

"Puma County Fantods"—WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN
H. S. M. KEMP—DAY KEENE—GORDON YOUNG

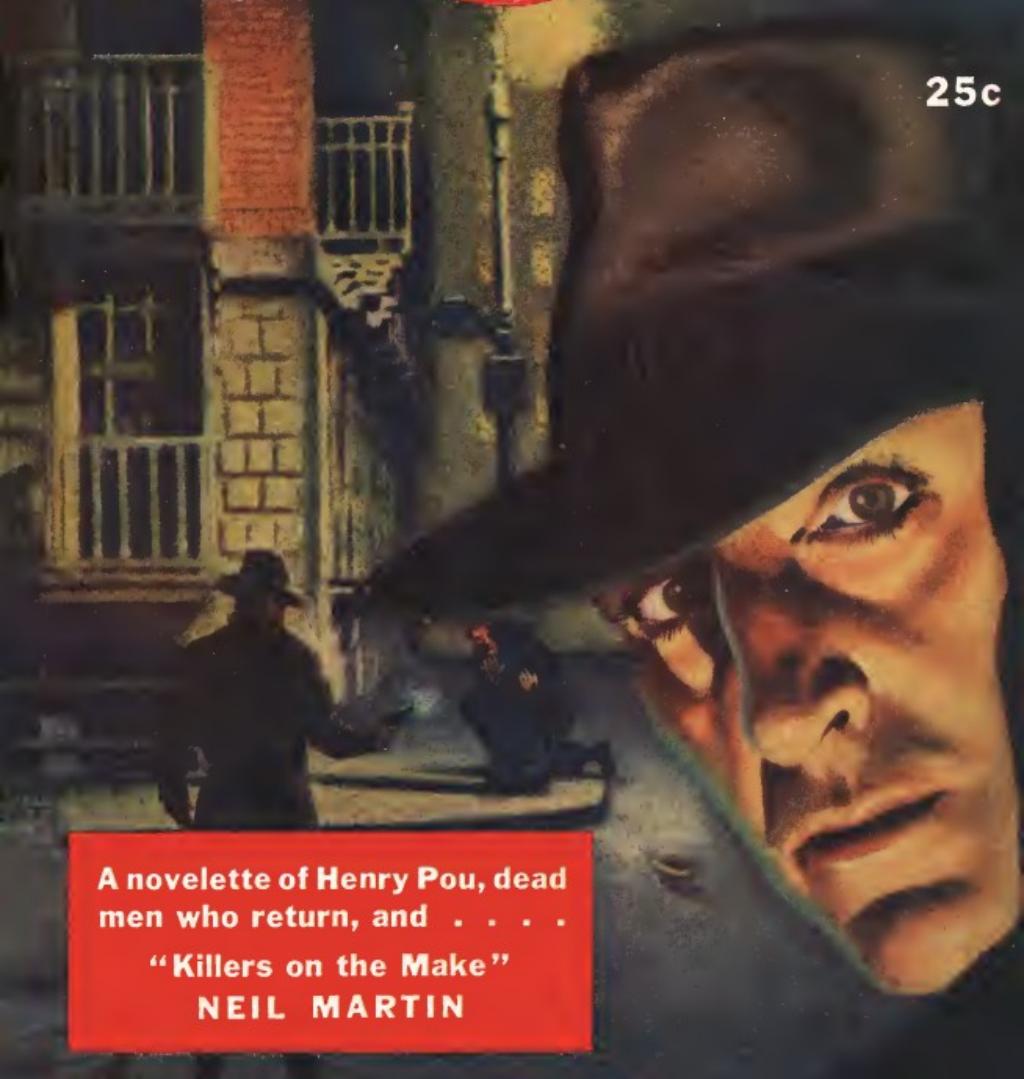
ANC

Short Stories

August 10th

Twice A Month

25c



A novelette of Henry Pou, dead
men who return, and

"Killers on the Make"

NEIL MARTIN

He's No Dope...

he's out for fun
on his
vacation!

BUT he doesn't want that lovely girl he meets at the Beach Club to turn him down on a date.

He doesn't want that charming couple at the hotel to put a black mark on him when they are looking for a fourth for bridge.

He wants people he likes to like him.

He wants fun.

So he's tucking a bottle of Listerine Antiseptic into his vacation bag. He calls it part of his passport to popularity. Because, as you know, Listerine Antiseptic is an extra-careful precaution against unpleasant breath (halitosis) of non-systemic origin.

Almost instantly it sweetens and freshens the breath, makes it less likely to offend . . . keeps it that way, too, for hours in most cases.

How about you?

Whenever—and wherever—you want to be at



your best never, never, omit Listerine Antiseptic. Use it systematically morning and night and before any date.

Incidentally, Listerine Antiseptic comes in pretty handy as a first-aid for minor cuts and abrasions, and to alleviate the irritation of bites and stings. Lambert Pharmacal Company.

Before any date

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC

to help you be at your best

ANOTHER PAL on your vacation is the new Listerine Tooth Paste with the clean, minty flavor.

CATTLE KINGS and oil tycoons—they're of the same stamp when it comes to appropriating too much of the earth's surface. Stub Williams knew the breed—they couldn't run him off!



"MASTER OF DEAD MAN'S DOME"

A novelette by **DEE LINFORD**



ONE REASON why cops sometimes find the going tough is that most folks at one time or another want to play detective.

"MURDER DEALS THE CARDS"

Wilbur S. Peacock

"Give a Man a Chance"

A man's past won't die a natural death; he has to kill it himself

**H. S. M.
KEMP**

If you make a deal with the Lord, looks like He'll play his part

**CADDO
CAMERON**

"The Reformation of Big Dan Hobbs"

o-o-o

All in the next SHORT STORIES

o-o-o

Short Stories

TWICE A
MONTH

THE
BEST
OF
AMERICA'S
ACTION
ADVENTURE
MYSTERY

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AUGUST 10th, 1948

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use
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THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KUHLHOFF

A Wildcat That's Far from Being Wild

A WILDCAT cartridge that has the bench rest and varmint shooters of the North-east agog is the .219 Donaldson Wasp.

Mr. Harvey A. Donaldson, who designed and developed this fine cartridge is an old-time shooter. He started his trigger squeezing activities in the early 1890's and has been at it ever since. From time to time reports of his experiments may be found in the *American Rifleman Magazine*.

His Wasp cartridge is the result of over ten years experimenting (with this one cartridge) and the expenditure of a tidy sum of do-re-me.

It seems to me, that if more shooters were to become familiar with Mr. Donaldson's work and put up a terrific clamor for commercial rifles chambered for one or more of the cartridges he has designed, he would receive a belated and well-deserved reward for his efforts.

Don't get the idea that I am plugging Mr. Donaldson because of friendship—for I have never had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman!

The Wasp cartridge is generally made by reforming and shortening the .219 Winchester Zipper case, although other cases such as the .30-30, .32 Remington, .25-35, and .22 Savage High Power may be used, as they all have the same head size as the Zipper. The powder charge behind the various .22-caliber copper-jacketed bullets, of course, differs according to the powder used and the weight of the bullet. But I understand that 27½ to 28-grains of Du Pont No. 3031 powder will push the 50-grain Wotkins-Morse bullet at a muzzle velocity of over 3,900 feet per second with fine accuracy.

The .22 Varminter (.22-250) which is made by necking down the .250-3000 Savage case is perhaps our most popular wildcat varmint cartridge at the present time. Inci-

dentially, the story goes that Donaldson developed this cartridge case, could get a one of the ammo. companies interested, and eventually turned it over to J. E. Gebby (the name Varminter is copyrighted) who makes rifles chambered for it for the custom trade. Now, it is claimed that the Wasp develops Varminter velocity and accuracy with 10-grains less powder. This means that the Wasp is a very efficient and well-balanced cartridge.

Last year at the annual competition of the National Bench Rest Shooter's Association, the Wasp cartridge did itself proud.

In this competition three shot groups were fired from bench rest by each shooter at the distance of 100 yards, with privilege of unlimited re-entrie. There are practically no restrictions in these contests as the idea is to find out just what the rifle and ammunition will do. Any rifle and ammunition may be used, and all that is required is that the shooter must aim the rifle for each shot and press the trigger with his finger.

The shooting range of 100 yards was adopted because at that distance it is very easy to see the bullet-holes with a good spotting scope. Also at 100 yards a good idea of what the rifle will do at longer ranges is obtained.

An inch group at 100 yards indicates a two-inch group at 200 yards and so on. And believe me a rifle that will consistently make one-inch group at a hundred yards is a durned good one!

Bearing this in mind, what size group do you think won the medals? Hold your hat—it measured 3/32-inch center to center of the bullet-holes that were farthest apart. That, of course, is a small one-hole group.

The five contestants having the smallest average group (taking all groups fired by the individual shooter and striking an average) were armed with bolt-action rifles chambered for the Wasp cartridge. These

winners all made their own jacketed bullets and loaded their own ammunition.

A number of rifles chambered for the Varminter cartridge were used, and they made very high averages.

Other cartridges used included the .220 Swift, .257 Roberts, and some of the Canadian contestants used the .22-303 Varmint-R Crandall cartridge.

The National Bench Rest Shooter's Association was formed to encourage this form of shooting, with the idea of increasing our knowledge of the rifle, and to contribute to its ultimate perfection, and to provide an interesting form of sport for all technically inclined shooters.

If you have never engaged in this fascinating branch of the shooting game you have certainly missed a lot of enjoyment. In fact, for shooters who get a kick out of making their own ammunition there is no hobby to equal it!

Many start out using a portable bench rest. There are several very satisfactory designs that have been worked out by experienced shooters—but some of these are quite heavy and hard to transport. Although not quite as steady as some, a portable bench rest made out of an old ironing board is quite handy and easy to lug around.

I made such a rest, and it has given quite good results. A padded box with notches at various heights is used for supporting the forearm of the rifle—but this is a controversial point and either the barrel or forearm may be placed on the rest, depending on which method works out best for the individual. The toe of the butt stock may be supported by the left fist (if the shooter is right-handed) and the delicate elevation adjustments made by clinching or slightly relaxing the fist. The elevation also may be controlled with a wedge-shaped piece of wood moved back and forth under the toe of the stock.

A good spotting scope is necessary (or at least very very helpful) when engaging in this type of shooting. Many bench rest shooters use fine 20-power telescope sights, with which bullet-holes in the target may be easily seen at 100 yards, or 200 yards in good light.

The shooter who has his own range usually builds a permanent bench for rest shooting. We made ours by sinking five cedar

posts in the ground about two and a half feet. They were the corner supports, the left hand side of the rear top is cut away for more comfort, which makes it necessary to use five posts. The top was made of heavy planks of native oak. The wood was green when nailed on, and consequently there was quite a bit of shrinkage which resulted in quite wide cracks. We fixed this by covering the top surface with linoleum. This bench rest is not a beautiful structure but it certainly is solid.



Every bench rest shooter has his own idea of what a bench should be, so they are as different as shooters!

A certain technique is acquired with practice, and inasmuch as the heartthrob of the riflemen is not transferred to the rifle (as in prone shooting with a sling) the bench rest shooter may obtain results that will almost equal that of machine rest shooting.

For practical shooting, such as testing of rifles and ammunition for individual use, the bench rest is much better than the machine rest as the rifle is fired more nearly under field conditions. When using the machine rest the rifle is most always stripped of butt stock and forearm.

Of course, when the main object is to test ammunition (such as various lots, or for use in national or international matches) the Mann V rest is used.

This rest is a V-shaped trough made with absolute accuracy. The rifle barrel is secured to two concentric rings, and a concentric action is screwed to the rear of the barrel. When fired the recoil is straight to the rear, the concentric rings sliding through the V of the trough. There is absolutely no whip or buckle of the barrel as when fired in a wooden stock.

To get back to bench rest shooting—why don't you give it a try. I'm sure you'll have some fun, and learn something to boot!

KILLERS ON THE MAKE

HENRY POU was just finishing his remoulade of shrimp when the two strangers entered *Le Chat d'Or* and seated themselves two tables away. He gave them a quick scrutiny over the edge of his coffee cup. Being investigator for the district attorney's office, in addition to being a conscientious cop, he concerned himself with the comings and goings of people in Papillon Parish.

"Oil field hands," he dismissed them after a moment's study.

Before Pearl Harbor, a stranger in this remote South Louisiana parish would have been obvious as a bandaged thumb. But since the discovery of oil in the vicinity, strangers no longer were unusual.

Henry glanced up again as one of the newcomers ordered in a loud voice:

"Make it two up on the steak grill-aid, Sugar."

Around Here Strangers Were Rare; Strange Murders Rarer



By NEIL MARTIN

The trim, dark-eyed waitress murmured an apology and pointed toward a cardboard sign hanging in front of the case register. It read:

MEATLESS TUESDAY

*On est prie de ne pas ordonner
de viande au jour d' hui,
que nous donnions secours
a nos amis en l' Europe.*

VIVE LE MARSHALL PLAN!

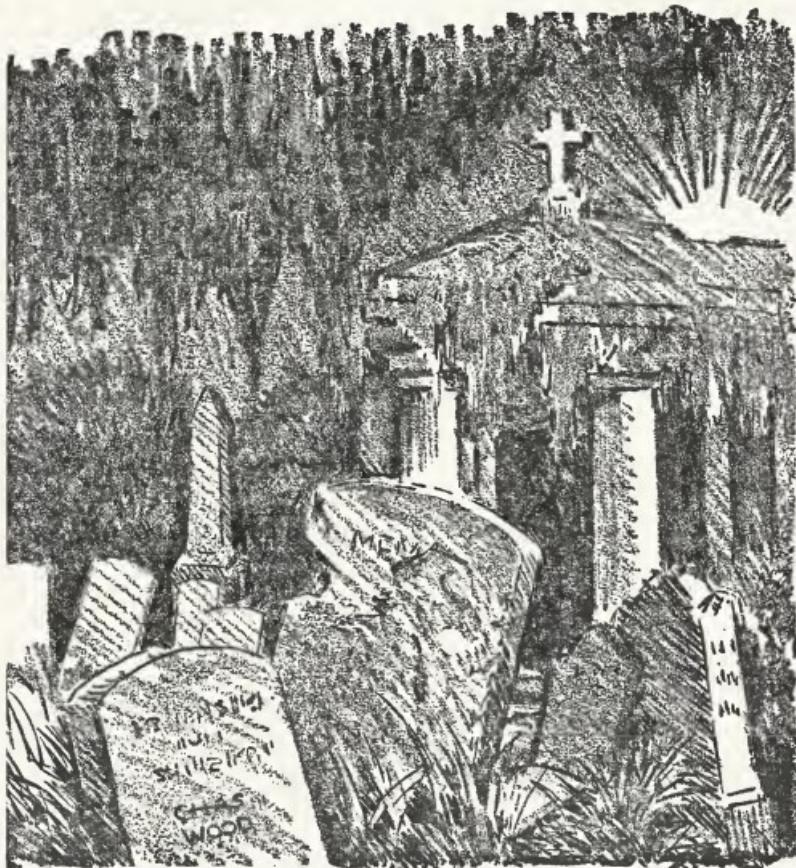
Henry's dark eyes twinkled with amuse-

ment as he read the sign, realizing that it was mere window dressing, aimed at the tourist trade, since most of the regular patrons of the Golden Cat were bilingual.

"To hell with that baloney!" the stranger was declaiming loudly. "Do we get that steak grill-aid, or don't we?"

Paul Vallon, the proprietor, a short man, with three chins, a noble paunch and a handlebar mustache that rivalled Henry's came from behind the cash register and waddled to the strangers' table.

"We do not serve the meat dish today, gentlemen," he explained. "We are try



to co-operate wit' M'sieu' le President Troo-man. Yes."

"Aw, don't hand me that!" the stranger retorted. "Do we get that steak grill-aid or net?"

"You do not, zhentlemen," Paul Vallon declared firmly "We 'ave make the rule; we do not break it for any wan. Non!" He bowed with Gallic politeness and waddled back to the post behind the cash register.

ALERT for trouble, Henry felt his left hip pocket, assuring himself that his black-jack was in place. The one who had done all the talking for the pair was glaring after Paul Vallon. He was a short, dapper fellow, with a narrow, sallow face, the most notable feature of which was a long, bony nose. He was attired in a two-tone sport coat, worn over rust-colored shirt and slacks, while his feet were encased in white and brown oxfords. Set at a cocky angle on his narrow head was a wide-brimmed panama hat with a gaudy band. Henry saw that he was drunk.

The man rose as if about to follow the proprietor. His companion gripped him by the coat sleeve and pulled him back into his chair.

"Pipe down, you damn fool!" the other man rumbled. "This ain't no time to go lookin' for trouble."

Henry stared in quiet watchfulness at the speaker, who was a tall, raw-boned redhead, with a seamy, hard-bitten face and beetling red eyebrows. He was, Henry realized, easily the more dangerous of the two. Also, he had the largest hands Henry had ever seen—huge hands, with long, muscular fingers and bony, red knuckles, their backs covered with a mat of coppery hair.

In attire, the red-haired man ran to neutral colors, for his garments were varying shades of gray, while his shoes and hat were plain black. He glanced at a strap watch on his right wrist, then muttered something in an undertone to his companion. Both looked toward the window.

Following their gaze, Henry saw a man peering into the restaurant over the painted lower half of the window. Because of the reflection of the inside lighting on the glass, the man's features were partly obscured. Nevertheless, there was something about the

face that prodded Henry's memory. He was doubly interested, too, by the fact that the man seemed to be watching the tall redhead and his gaudily attired companion.

Through the wide screen door, Henry saw a blue sedan case quietly in against the curbing. A man stepped out of the car, crossed the banquette in a couple of strides and peered through the window, his glance sweeping over the crowded dining room until it came to rest upon the two strangers. Henry had a mere glimpse of a long, bony face, shadowed by the brim of a steel-gray hat, before the second man turned and hurried back to the car. Looking for the first watcher, Henry saw that he had gone.

The two strangers rose and walked slowly toward the door. Outside in the street, the motor of the blue sedan roared into life. The red-haired man stepped aside and spoke apologetically to Paul Vallon, who beamed and declared with much hand-waving.

"Thass all right, Meestaire. You come in tomorrow and we feex you up wit' the bes' steak grillade you ever threw a lip over. You betcha!"

The red-haired man helped himself to a toothpick and followed his companion. Henry saw the shorter man punch angrily at the screen door, forcing it open, and then step through to the banquette, with the redhead several paces behind him.

Suddenly, from the street, there came the crashing report of a shotgun. Henry saw the interior of the sedan being lighted by the flare of the discharge an instant before he saw the short man pitch face downward to the banquette.

Again, the shotgun roared, blasting a hole in the door screen. Inside the restaurant, people dived under their tables as a second charge ripped through the screen a few feet above the floor. Henry saw the red-haired man on the floor, saw him roll quickly to one side out of the line of fire an instant before the shotgun thundered for the third time. Then, with an accelerating bellow, the blue sedan backed away from the curbing straightened and went roaring down the street toward the levee.

HENRY jerked his six-shooter from its scabbard and ran toward the entrance. He barged through the shattered screen door to the banquette just in time to see the red-

tail lights of the car whip from sight around the corner into Front Street. A few passers-by had halted, standing as if frozen in their tracks, to stare at the still figure lying face downward on the banquette. From the direction of Courthouse Square a police whistle shrilled.

Henry shoved his gun back in its holster, stooped and laid the back of his right hand against the side of the prostrate man's neck, vainly seeking a pulse. He straightened as a city cop came pounding up, pistol in hand.

"What goes here?" the policeman demanded.

"This man," Henry explained, "he has bin kill' wit' a shotgun. He's daid, him. Jus' the same, you better call Doc Lavelle and Vince Cartier."

The policeman hurried into the restaurant to telephone. Looking after him, Henry saw no sign of the red-haired man. He shrugged; he surmised that the fellow wouldn't welcome questioning by the police. He looked about him, trying to locate the man whom he had first noticed looking through the window.

Standing above the body, he peered into the faces of the growing crowd, trying to recall what the first watcher had looked like. Henry was easily the shortest man present, for he stood a scant five feet three in his shoes, and was almost as broad at the shoulder. Yet there wasn't an ounce of fat on his short, compact frame. Neat and dapper in a summer police uniform, his wide face shadowed by the brim of his black ten-gallon hat, he stood with thumbs hooked in his gleaming Sam Browne belt, his shrewd, dark eyes searching the faces around him.

"Somebody saw a red-hair' man in a gray suit, yes?" he prompted.

Apparently, no one had, because no one spoke. Which, Henry thought, was strange, red-haired persons being so unusual in the lower delta country as to be something of a novelty. Obviously, this particular red-head was skilled in the art of making himself inconspicuous.

When the city policeman returned, having made the calls, Henry left him to guard the body and went inside the restaurant. In the center of the now empty dining room Paul Vallon was waving his short arms about his head and swearing with Gallic volubility.

"That one," he stuttered in French, "he has ruined my whole evening. Half my customers ran out without paying. And look at my screen door!"

"Those that ran out will be back to settle up," Henry consoled him, adding, "And you needed a new screen door, anyway. Did you see the red-haired one run back here?"

"Did I?" Vallon choked. "No!" He beat the air with his plump hands and continued, "That one, he ran through the kitchen to the alley. He frightened my chef almost to death with his gun."

Henry shrugged, then turned and walked back to the street, realizing that the red-haired man had made a complete getaway. When he stepped out on the banquette again, he found Doctor Lavelle on his knees beside the body, with Vince Cartier, Sellerville's chief of police, standing by.

"So you let this murder be pulled off right under your nose, Henry?" the doctor jeered. "Henry, the infallible. Hal!"

Henry grinned down at the broad back of the doctor, who officiated both as medical examiner and parish coroner. He was a portly man, with a high, bald forehead, with shell-rimmed glasses straddling the bridge of his short, beaked nose giving him a somewhat owlish expression. He was going through the dead man's clothing now, bringing to light a fat billfold, a letter postmarked in St. Odile, and addressed to "Mr. Ed. Harvey, General Delivery, Kansas City, Kan." There were also a small, pearl-handled penknife, ninety-five cents in loose change and a broken pack of cigarettes. Fitting snugly under the dead man's left armpit was a clip holster holding a .45 caliber automatic, while tucked inside the waistband of his trousers and covered by his shirt was a .25 caliber automatic of foreign make.

"Obviously an old baddie," the M. E. grunted. "No decent, God-fearing citizen would go about the country carrying an arsenal like this one." He rose, dusted off the knees of his trousers and declared with professional brevity, "He's all yours. Inquest usual place. Ten-thirty tomorrow." He picked up his black bag and shoved through the crowd to his car.

Vince Cartier turned appealingly to Henry. "You'll help us on this, Henry?" he pleaded.

Henry stroked his handlebar mustache and grinned at the younger man. He really liked

Vince Cartier, whose knowledge of crime detection represented almost a total zero. But he was scrupulously honest, played no favorites and was eager to learn the duties of the post to which he had been elected by an overwhelming GI vote.

"She's yo' haidache, ma frien'," Henry chuckled. "Me, I am jus' wan mo' innocent bystander. Yes." He turned his head as Stacy's dead wagon turned the corner and stopped outside the restaurant with screeching tires." Mebbe the D. A., he will put me on it," he resumed, facing the police chief. "Less ride back to Stacy's wit' that wan and tak' his fingerprints. Mebbe we'll have us somet'ing to start from then."

HE and Cartier rode with the body to the undertaking establishment, where the dead man was laid out on a zinc-covered table in the back room. Cartier telephoned headquarters and ordered the fingerprinting outfit sent over. When it came, Henry took three sets of the dead man's fingerprints. Next, he ordered the body stripped.

In the interval, he looked over the dead man's effects. He read the letter, which was neatly typed, and ran:

"Dear Danny:

At last I have learned where Ed went when he pulled out on me in N. O. I'll need your help in locating what you know. I wish you and Pete would get down here. I'll meet you at the Golden Cat, in Sellerville, on Tuesday, Oct. 14, at seven o'clock in the evening. I'll give you the rest of the dope when I see you.

(signed) L.

P. S. The sign on the front of the Golden Cat restaurant reads "*Le Chat d'Or.*" That is Golden Cat in French."

Henry handed the letter to Cartier. "Seems lak," he drawled, "this wan w'at sign himself 'L' decoyed this feller and his pal here jus' to murder them. Yes."

The police chief nodded. "In view of what's happened," he declared, "I'm inclined to agree with you. It has all the earmarks of a gang killing. That's something new in these parts."

"Gang killing, yes," Henry concurred. "Obviously, the red-hair wan w'at got away

is the Pete referred to in the letter. That L plan' to rub 'em out, and fo' that reason decoyed 'en here. Well, we won't know any mo' until we get a report on this wan's prints."

"How long will that take, Henry?" Cartier asked.

Henry shrugged. "Who knows? We may have to go plumb to the F. B. I. files in Washington."

He glanced at his wrist watch and pouted, suddenly reminded of a rather unpleasant chore.

His job as investigator for the district attorney's office was only part time, his full-time job being town marshall of St. Odile, thirty-one miles south of the parish seat.

"*Ma foi!*" he grunted. "I plumb fo'got all about that, me." Turning to Cartier, he explained, "Some folks in St. Odile are putting on a *fais do-do* this evening."

The police chief grinned. "And you have to stand by to keep the cut-ups in line, eh?"

"Thass right," Henry confirmed, adding, "You know, some tam' it tak' very leetle to turn a peaceful dance into a knock-down-and-drag out fight. Jus' let some feller try to dance wit' some other feller's gal, and blooey!" He slid a card bearing the dead man's fingerprints into his shirt pocket.

"Well they ain't no neccesity fo' me hanging around here. I have jus' about enough time to make the bus. Be seeing you!"

He ducked out the back door into the alley and ran toward the bus station a block away.

BY MIDNIGHT Henry was feeling more optimistic. The *fais do-do* had, despite his misgivings, turned out to be rather a tame affair. The men's knives had been checked with their hats, and the liquid dynamite known as sangaree was notably absent. Consequently, there was no trouble.

Standing in the shadow of a pile of lumber on the levee across from the house where the dance was being held, Henry looked through the front door into the living room, from which the furniture had been cleared. Benches and chairs ranged along the walls were occupied by mamas and papas, who sipped black coffee and watched in smiling admiration as their offspring circled the room to the languid rhythm of

"Jolie Blond," which was being played for the tenth time that evening.

On the whole, Henry was pleased. He liked to see people enjoying themselves, and never could see any sense in a dance being broken up by some vainglorious citizen loaded to the teeth with sangaree. The orchestra, too, was good, consisting of a violin, a guitar, an accordeon, a flute and, of course, the three little irons, without which no Cajan dance band would be complete.

On arriving in St. Odile a few hours earlier, Henry had mailed the card bearing the dead man's fingerprints to the New Orleans field office of the F. B. I., in hope that his friend Dan Corrigan would be able to furnish some information concerning the victim. Jimmy had come up with the report that a blue Chevrolet sedan had been stolen from in front of Madame Lafarge's boarding house on Main Street, while the owner, a New Orleans drummer, was inside at supper.

The incident of the stolen car gave Henry a clear picture of what had happened. The one signing himself "L" had made a murder date with the red-haired man and his gaudily attired companion, had stolen the drummer's car in St. Odile, and had driven to Sellerville. Locating his quarry in the Golden Cat, he had waited for them to come out and, when the shorter of the pair had emerged from the restaurant, had blasted him down with his shotgun. But he had been in too great a hurry. If he had waited a minute or two longer, the red-haired man would have been outside the door, and the killer could have accomplished his purpose. But the red-haired man's pausing to apologize to Paul Vallon for his companion's rudeness had saved his skin. Now he was loose somewhere in the parish and doubtless breathing vengeance against the one who had taken his partner's life.

Jimmy Bourdelon glanced at his wrist watch and broke in upon Henry's thoughts. He said: "Well, so far, this is one *fais do-do* that's been all sweetness and light." He grinned and rapped his knuckles against the lumber pile. "But we've still got ten minutes to go."

Henry turned and looked toward the drawbridge spanning the bayou at the foot of Main Street, as a bus rolled into town and headed up the tree-lined thoroughfare to its stop in front of Brossin's Drug Store.

"Las' bus fo' the night," he declared. He looked at his watch, saw that the hands were pointing to eight minutes of twelve. Soon, he told himself with a feeling of relief, the orchestra would swing into "La Golondrina," or "Home, Sweet Home," and the dance would come to a close without the painful necessity of his having had to render some belligerent fellow townsman hors de combat with a blackjack.

THE minutes ticked slowly by. "Jolie Blond" came to an end, and the orchestra swung into the finale. Only a few couples stepped out for the last dance. The others stood around in little groups. A few started to leave. Then Henry saw the stranger stumbling along the uneven banquette, coming from the direction of Main Street. Reaching the house, the newcomer grasped the gatepost for support. Then he wavered across the narrow dooryard, climbed the few steps to the shelf-like galerie and staggered through the doorway into the living room.

"Oh-oh!" Jimmy exclaimed. "We'd better remove that character before he starts something. He's pickled to the gills."

"Less go," Henry suggested, starting to cross the road.

The newcomer's entrance had a strange effect upon the gathering inside the house. The music of the finale stopped as if the members of the orchestra had suddenly become paralyzed. The operator of the three little irons sat with his hammer poised, his mouth open, his eyes fixed in superstitious horror upon the stranger, who stood, swaying drunkenly, beneath the chandelier. Suddenly the operator dropped his little hammer and screamed:

"Claude Sandras!"

The effect was electrical. A woman screamed: "*Un revenant!*" Then everyone tried to leave at once.

"That," Jimmy declared, "is one way to break up a dance."

Henry plunged through the dooryard and up the steps to the galerie, with Jimmy close behind him. The front doorway was jammed with shrieking women and cursing, frightened men, all trying to get through the opening, only to block it with their bodies. In the center of the room, the stranger stood beneath the chandelier, his mouth stretched in a tipsy grin, apparently

enjoying the commotion caused by his entrance.

"Steady, everybody!" Henry boomed. "There's nothing to be frightened about."

When no one paid any attention to his command, he jerked loose the screen from one of the front windows and climbed through into the room. Then he and Jimmy fell upon the panic-stricken mob from behind and started dragging them back from the doorway.

Not until the jam was broken did Henry turn his attention to the cause of the disturbance.

He stared angrily at the stranger, a short, slender man, with too much nose and not enough chin, an insignificant-looking little man, with a long, sallow face topped by a mop of tousled black hair. Henry's gaze started at the man's dusty shoes, traveled slowly upward over his cheap, hand-me-down-blue serge suit and then stopped at his simpering face. Suddenly Henry felt a prickle of gooseflesh along his spine and, for an instant he, too, was tempted to turn and flee.

"It just can't be!" he muttered. "It can not be. No!"

He turned questioningly to Jimmy, saw no recognition in the eyes of his assistant then turned back to the stranger, aware now that he was looking upon the face of a man whose body he had seen taken from the bayou nearly seven years before, a man for whose murder another had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

But even that seemed insignificant when he recognized the tipsy stranger as one of the men whom he had seen looking through the window of the Golden Cat just before the murder.

HENRY controlled his momentary feeling of superstitious awe and clutched the stranger's coat sleeve. Reassured by the feel of the cloth that this was no ghost, he said:

"Claude Sandras, yes?"

"Sho', sho'," the other replied with tipsy affability. "Wash matter, Henry, m' ol' cabbage? Donsha rec'nish ol' frien'? Hic!"

Henry looked at Jimmy, who was rubbing his long chin, his dark eyes revealing amused perplexity. "You know this wan, yes?"

"Hell, no!" the ex-marine denied. "What's it all about?"

"Somet'ing w'at happen' w'ile you were away in the war," Henry explained. "I'll tell you about that after we put this man w'ere he cain't scare folks half to death." He hooked his fingers in Sandras coat cuff. "Let's go."

"Shay," the drunk protested loudly, "wash the idea? I ain't done nothin'."

"You're dronk and disorderly," Henry warned, motioning to Jimmy to clear the way. "Come along!"

The people drew back as Henry and his prisoner headed toward the street. Several women crossed themselves devoutly. Everyone seemed willing to give the newcomer a wide berth.

Henry steered his prisoner along the bayou road and up Main Street to the town hall, where he pushed open a green basement door marked "Police Headquarters," and ushered the man into a small whitewashed room, which was lighted by a single bulb hanging from the ceiling.

The little room was scrupulously clean, despite its battered furnishings, which consisted of a desk, a safe, a filing cabinet and several chairs, all looking as if they had been donated by the town garbage collector. On a packing box set against the inner wall stood a small oil stove holding an enamel-ware coffee dripper. To the left of the desk was an inner door leading to the lock-up. Tacked on a bulletin board beside the door were several police circulars.

Henry pushed his prisoner into a chair before the desk. Then he opened a drawer of the filing cabinet and took out three cups, which he filled with coffee from the dripper. He handed a cup to Sandras, another to Jimmy and carried the third one around behind his desk. Seating himself in his creaky swivel chair, he took a sip of coffee, which was black and strong enough to float a concrete block.

"Drink it down, ma frien'," he encouraged Sandras. "She'll sober you up queek. Yes."

Sandras took a swallow of coffee and sighed his appreciation.

"Ain't had me a good cup o' coffee since I bin away," he declared, then emptied the cup in a single draught.

Henry motioned to Jimmy to refill San-

dras' cup. When the second helping was set before the prisoner, Henry remarked conversationally:

"So, you bin away? Jus' w're you bin, ma frien'?"

"Jus' about every place a ship can go," Sandras boasted. "I made me the run to Murmansk fo' tam' during the war. Yes."

Jimmy chuckled. "Brother, you sure get around."

"You were wit' the Merchant Marine, yes?" Henry quizzed.

"Sho' was!" Sandras beamed tipsily across the desk at Henry. But he seemed more sober now." An' I got me somethin' to prove it." He reached into his inner coat pocket and produced a fat wallet which he passed across the desk.

Henry removed the rubber band and opened the wallet, which contained Sandras' discharge, union card and seaman's passport. Looking through the discharges, Henry noted that the first one was dated on August 25, 1941. He looked across the desk at Sandras and asked:

"W're were you on or about September Thirtieth, in 'Fo'ty-wan?"

Sandras indicated his discharges with a none-too-clean forefinger. "I was at sea, boun' fo' England. You'll fin' the proof there." He frowned at Henry, almost sober now. "Say, whass all this ya-ya about?"

HENRY returned the man's papers to the wallet and dropped it into a desk drawer. "Did you know that Octave Beaujean, he was arrested and given a life sentence fo' murder—yo' murder?"

Sandras poked himself in the chest with his right forefinger.

"Me—murder?" he exclaimed. "I can't be!"

"It is as you say," Henry continued in French. "It cannot be, since you are alive and well. Nevertheless, you are dead, legally."

"You're joking, *M'sieu*," Sandras murmured.

Henry shook his head. "I am not joking, *mon ami*. This affair is too serious for joking. Why did you leave here without letting anyone know you were going?"

"Frightened," Sandras admitted, "as you'd be, if that Octave Beaujean had threatened to slit you like a fish!"

"He quarrelled with you about a girl named Marie Duplessis, yes?"

Sandras nodded. "I came back to see if she was married."

Why didn't you write and let people here know you were still alive?"

The other shrugged. "I have no kin, except my aunt, Armontine Duclos. Why waste postage on one who wouldn't care whether I was alive or dead?"

"A month after you disappeared," Henry went on, "a body was found floating in the bayou. It was badly decomposed. But your tante Armontine Duclos identified it as yours. Since she was your only relative, the whole case rested upon her identification. And since Octave Beaujean was known to have threatened you, he was arrested and charged with your murder."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Sandras groaned. "Was he executed?"

Henry shook his head slowly. "Some of the jury weren't convinced that the body was yours, and held out for acquittal. In the end, they compromised on life imprisonment."

"We must get Octave out of prison," Sandras declared.

"Octave," Henry drawled, "already has attended to that small detail. He escaped from Angola nearly two weeks ago."

"*Dieu!*" Sandras drew a none-too-clean handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped his forehead. "What if he should meet me?"

"I don't think you have anything to fear from him," Henry pointed out. "He probably is far from Louisiana. The main thing, however, is to prove to the circuit judge that no murder was committed by Beaujean."

"I'll do anything to clear him," Sandras promised, now cold sober. "When the judge sees me, he'll dismiss the charge against Octave."

Henry shook his head. "It won't be as simple as that, *mon ami*. A lot of red tape will need to be unwound before Beaujean's name will be cleared. First of all, Beaujean must either return to Angola, or surrender himself to the sheriff. However, we'll let the district attorney worry about that. I'm taking you over to see him in the morning."

"I'll do whatever I can to help Octave," Sandras promised.

"So much for that," Henry said. He fixed

Sandras with cold, dark eyes and demanded, "What were you doing in front of *Le Chat d'Or* about seven o'clock this evening—or should I say last evening?"

"I was waiting for a table," Sandras declared.

"So? It happens that I saw you watching two men a few tables from where I was sitting," Henry challenged. "I mean the pair who were shot at from a blue sedan."

"I looked at them," Sandras revealed, "because I came south on the bus with them." He went on, "You see, I was paid off a ship in New Orleans yesterday, and, since this was the first time I'd been back in the old town since I'd shipped out back in 'Forty-one, I decided to take a trip down home and see some people I used to know, particularly one Marie Duplessis."

"I met up with Dave and Pete on the bus. When they found out that I was from these parts, they asked a lot of questions. Dave had a fifth of Three Feathers, and kept passing it around among the three of us, so that by the time we reached Sellerville Dave and I were feeling pretty good. But Pete was cold sober. He asked me the way to *Le Chat d'Or*, and then gave me the brush-off when I tried to tag along. Well, I was never one to shove in where I wasn't wanted, so I stopped at Willie Campion's newsstand and looked over some magazines. Then I decided to go for one of Paul Vallon's steaks, and walked down to the Golden Cat. I looked inside and saw there were no vacant tables. So I waited around outside until I saw Pete and Dave coming out. Just as Dave reached the sidewalk, some guy in a car began blasting away with a shotgun. I thought he was shooting at me, so I got away from there in a hurry. That's about all."

"The one who did the shooting," Henry said reflectively, "he stepped out of the car and looked through the window. You noticed him, yes?"

"*Mais oui!*" Sandras declared. "I could pick that one out in a crowd. But I am not so sure about the other, as I didn't see his face."

"There was another, yes?"

"Certainly, *M'sieur'*—the one who drove the car." Sandras explained adding, "But I didn't see him clearly."

Henry looked at his watch, the hands of which were pointing to twenty minutes past one. "I believe that will be enough for this session," he said, yawning. "I'll take you over to the D. A. in the morning. Meanwhile, we'll put you to bed." He nodded to Jimmy. "Take him back."

The ex-marine flung open the inner door and switched on an overhead light, revealing a narrow passage leading to a barred cage furnished with an iron cot. Raising his right hand, he crooked his forefinger at Sandras and invited "this way, Monsieur."

"Does this mean that I'm under arrest?" Sandras inquired.

"That," Henry drawled, "depends on you. A while ago you were drunk and disorderly. You broke up that *fais do-do*, remember. If I press that charge, you'll get at least thirty days. However, if you agree to co-operate with us, I'll forget that charge. How about it?"

"Oh, all right," Sandras surrendered. He rose and followed Jimmy to the cage.

When the ex-marine returned to the office, after putting Sandras to bed, his long face wore a contemplative smile.

"Eh, man!" he exclaimed, Cajan fashion, "what a story that'll make. Can't you see the headline 'Murdered Man Returns from the Dead.' Listen, how about keeping Sandras under wraps tomorrow until Sue can wire the story to one of her papers?"

Henry twisted one horn of his handlebar mustache about his right forefinger and considered the proposal. The former Suzanne Lanier was now Madame Bourdelon, and her earnings as local correspondent for the leading New Orleans daily went far toward financing the home which Jimmy had recently purchased.

"*Tres bien,*" Henry agreed. "We'll let her get the story off before we tell Fonetette." He rose and walked from behind his desk. "We might as well take it easy until we get a report on those prints. I'm going home for a few hours' sleep."

WHEN Henry returned to headquarters some six hours later, he found a blue Chevrolet sedan parked in front of the entrance. He was looking the car over when Jimmy came out.

"I found it parked down by the municipal wharf," the ex-marine explained. "The steer-

ing wheel was wiped clean, also the door-handles. But there were three empty shotgun shells lying on the floorboards. I got clear prints of the tips of a man's right fore-finger and thumb from each of them."

Henry smiled his approval. "Now we're really going places," he declared.

"I photographed the empty shells," Jimmy told him. "The fingerprints showed good and clear. You want me to send one of the pictures to Corrigan?"

"I think it would be best to try Corrigan first," Henry said. "We'll probably get an answer from him sooner than we will from the state."

He went inside, where he found Sandras sitting in a chair, washed and combed, and apparently none the worse for his recent bout with John Barleycorn. Jimmy explained:

"Sue wanted to talk to him personally, so I roused him out. She's down at the telegraph office now, sending the story off."

Sandras inquired loudly: "How about some breakfast? I'm hungry."

Henry conducted Sandras down Main Street to Madame Lefarge's boarding house and fed him a hearty breakfast of ham and eggs and coffee. When they returned to headquarters nearly an hour later, Suzanne and Jimmy were sitting on the bench outside the cigar.

"Thanks, Henry!" Suzanne greeted him with twinkling brown eyes. "Letting me get the story off before you told M'sieu' Fontenette was real nice of you. Now I'm to do a follow-up under my own by-line."

Henry's broad face stretched still wider in a grin of anticipation.

"It is too bad that you can't record *M'sien' le Procureur's* reactions when he hears that Claude Sandras isn't dead," he drawled, adding in English, "That would be jus' too dam funny, yes."

Suzanne rose. "Well, I now must go home and cook breakfast for my man. A thousand thanks." She turned and walked away, five feet and three inches of blonde glamour in a print house dress.

Henry went inside to his desk, lowered himself into his swivel chair and picked up the telephone. Putting in a call to the district attorney's office, he waited until the operator informed him that the call was ready, and Albert Fontenette's voice rasped in the receiver with the peculiar whistling

buzz caused by his loosely fitting false teeth. "What did you call me about, Henri?"

Henry drawled, "I called to tell you that Claude Sandras has returned."

In the moment of dead silence that followed, Henry surmised that the district attorney was searching the recesses of his agile brain in an effort to identify Claude Sandras. Then Henry heard a sudden intake of breath, followed by an incredulous "*Comment?*"

"I said Claude Sandras has returned," Henry repeated. He winked across the desk at the owner of the name. "You recall that one, yes?"

"*Mais,*" the D. A. screamed into the telephone, "that's impossible. The man is dead."

HENRY chuckled. "That one is the liveliest corpse I've ever seen. I arrested him last night on a D. and D. charge. He is now here in the office with me."

"*Ma foi!*" Fontenette exclaimed. "What's to be done?" "All that can be done is to have the charge against Octave Beaujean dismissed," Henry pointed out.

Fontenette's dentures clacked loudly in the receiver as he sucked them back in place. "You don't seem to realize where this places us, my dear Henry," he buzzed.

"Speak for yourself," Henry retorted. "I had nothing to do with sending Beaujean to the penitentiary. You and Vicou handled that case from first to last."

"This is terrible," Fontenette groaned. "The Young Liberals will crucify us."

"I don't think it is terrible," Henry pointed out. "Sandras is alive and well, which frees Octave Beaujean of the charge of murder. Why not forget politics for a while and concern yourself with common justice?"

"Yes, yes," the D. A. said hastily. "Of course! When you come over to the inquest, please bring Sandras with you."

Henry glanced through the open doorway and saw a bus rolling across the drawbridge into town. He said:

"There will be a bus leaving here in ten minutes. Sandras and I will be on it."

"*Tres bien*—and, Henri, I'm going into court in a few minutes. If I should happen to be out of my office when you arrive, please don't show Sandras around the courthouse

until I have had a chance to talk with him. understand?

"Certainly," Henry said. He cradled the telephone, rose and put on his hat and nodded to Sandras. "*Allons!*"

WHEN Henry and Sandras climbed the stairs to the district attorney's office, on the second floor of the parish courthouse, in Sellerville, they discovered that Fontenette was still in court. In the sheriff's office, just across the corridor, Alphonse Vicou, criminal sheriff of Papillon Parish, was pacing to and fro with short, mincing steps, as if his long, skinny legs were loosely tied at the ankles.

Seeing Henry and Sandras in the corridor, the sheriff invited:

"Come in, Messieurs." He peered at Sandras and said, "So this is the returned gentleman?"

"Hell!" Sandras objected loudly in English. "Don' call me a ghost. I don't lak' that, me."

Vicou's thin lips stretched in a grin. He told Henry "Fontenette is still in court. Sit down and make yourselves at home."

He resumed his pacing, his hands clasped behind his back, his body bending forward from the waist, while his head stretched to the limit of his skinny, wrinkled neck like the head of an inquisitive turtle. The sheriff was about fifty, and thin to the point of emaciation, except for a slight bulge at the mid section, which looked like a small watermelon tucked inside his shirt. He paused at his desk, opened a humidor and passed cigars to Henry and Sandras. Then he hooked his thumbs in his violently red suspenders and regarded Sandras with quizzical brown eyes.

"How come you ain't daid?" he asked in Cajan English.

Sandras shrugged. "I jus' ain't, me," he retorted. "You ack lak' you are plumb disappoint'. Yes."

Vicou looked at Henry and grinned. "Not me," he denied. "Albair, he's the wan w'at's disappoint', him. Eh, man! That Albair, he's fit to be tie."

The telephone tinkled. Vicou stepped over to the desk and picked up the receiver. "Sheriff's office, yes?" he responded. "Oh, that you, Alcee? Yes, I'll be right down."

He cradled the telephone and started

toward the door. "Mak' yo'selfs right to home," he invited. "I got to step over to the jail." He minced from the room and hurried along the corridor toward the stairs.

"That wan," Sandras murmured, as the sheriff's footfalls sounded on the stair treads, "if he was a racehorse, he could stan' right on the starting line and win by a neck, him. By dam, yes!" He shrugged deeper into his chair and puffed luxuriously on the gift cigar.

Henry stood in the window, his hands clasped behind his back, and looked out over Courthouse Square toward Stacy's Funeral Home, where he was due to attend the inquest upon the body of the murdered man in about half an hour. He was vaguely uneasy. Now that Claude Sandras was back, Henry feared that trouble would result. Octave Beaujean might have managed to get clear out of the country. Even at that moment, he might be in Mexico, or Canada. But he had plenty of kinsmen, *brulees*, who refused to conform to modernity, people who lived in almost inaccessible places in order to avoid such embarrassing adjuncts to civilization as school boards and tax collectors. Like all Cajan families, those Beaujeans were closely knit. And an injury to one was an injury to all. Consequently, although Octave might be far away, there were plenty of male Beaujeans left to wreak vengeance for him.

"We may yet have another Sandras murder on our hands," Henry thought. "And this time there will be no mistake about it."

So occupied was he with his thoughts that he didn't know that Fontenette was in his office until the district attorney's secretary stepped across the corridor and announced:

"Mr. Fontenette will see you now, Captain Henry."

"Hokay, Miss Bernadette." He beckoned to Sandras. "Come along."

When Sandras entered the district attorney's office, Fontenette gave him a long stare that was faintly tinged with hostility. The D.A. waved both of them to chairs, then looked at Henry and asked:

"How did you happen to pick him up?"

Henry glanced toward the secretary, who had seated herself at her desk and was waiting with pencil poised above her note-

book. Grinning, he told Fontenette of the scene at the dance the night before.

"He was recognized by those present, then?" the D. A. said.

Henry chuckled. "You should have seen them try to get out of that house." He turned to Sandras. "Hokay, tell the D. A. jus' w'at you tol' me las' night."

SANDRAS told his story, beginning with his flight from St. Odile nearly seven years before. The D. A. listened in rapt attention. He was a short, slender man, dapper as a junior-size fashion model in a gray pin-stripe suit. His sallow, wrinkled face was topped with an unruly mop of snowy hair, through which he ran his fingers from time to time, until his head resembled a white, wind-blown chrysanthemum.

As Sandras concluded with his version of the scene outside the Golden Cat the previous evening, Fontenette asked:

"You would recognize that man if you were to see him again, yes?"

"I never forget a face," Sandras declared.

"Very well." The D. A. dismissed him with a wave. "You will please return to the sheriff's office."

Sandras rose and walked back across the corridor to Vicou's office. As the secretary closed the door after him, Fontenette opened a desk drawer and took out a paper which Henry instantly recognized as a police circular.



"This is from the state penitentiary," Fontenette said, laying the paper before Henry. "They were a bit late in getting it out."

Henry stared at the paper, which carried the front and profile view of a not unpleasing face, although the owner seemed to have affected an air of sullen defiance

when ordered to look at the camera. The particulars gave the young man's name as Octave Beaujean, Number 2618749. Age 25. Height, 5 feet eight inches. Weight, 130 pounds. Hair, black. Complexion, sallow. Eyes, dark brown. Distinguishing marks, none. Fingerprint classification, eighteen one utr twenty; one utr nineteen. "Officers are warned to approach this man with caution, as he is known to be armed."

Fontenette looked up from a letter he was reading. "This is from the warden," he revealed. "He tells me that Beaujean was a model prisoner, and would have been eligible for parole in a few more years. He warns me that Beaujean is known to have stolen a .38 caliber Colt Special from the prison infirmary, where he was employed as an orderly."

He returned the letter to the desk drawer, then leaned back in his chair and regarded Henry with quizzical brown eyes. He said:

"I have it on reliable authority that Beaujean stayed at Ile d'Argile all last week. That's pretty close to your own bailiwick."

"So?" Henry drawled. Ile d'Argile was a fishing and trapping settlement on Bayou Papillon about five miles south of St. Odile.

"I'd like you to go down there," the D. A. suggested. "Even if Beaujean is no longer there, you could spread the word around that he is no longer wanted as an escapee. The grapevine would spread the news all over the marsh country."

"What about Sandras—are you going to let him run loose?"

Fontenette shrugged. "We don't dare hold him, *mon cher Henri*," he pointed out. "Even if we detained him as a material witness in last night's murder case, he could employ a lawyer to get him out on a writ of habeas corpus. And the young Liberals would claim that I was trying to hush up the Beaujean matter by keeping Sandras in confinement." He glanced at the clock on his desk. "It's almost ten-thirty. You'd better get over to that inquest."

Henry took Sandras to Stacy's undertaking establishment, where the inquest on last night's victim of the shotgun murder was being held. After they had given their testimony, Henry left, knowing what the verdict would be. Outside on the banquette, Sandras inquired:

"What is one supposed to do now?"

Henry shrugged. "You are free as the air," he declared, adding, "So long as you don't try to leave this jurisdiction."

"I don't aim to leave," Sandras assured him. "I'm going back to St. Odile and visit with my tante for a while. Afterward, I'm buying a lugger and going into the shrimping business. That is, if I can square myself with Octave Beaujean."

Henry turned and walked toward the bus station, with Sandras at his side. After they had bought their tickets, Henry suggested:

"After dinner I am going down the bayou to Ile d'Argile. If you care to come along...." He left the sentence unfinished.

Sandras lit a cigarette and asked: "You figure Octave is there, yes?"

Henry shrugged. "Even if he is not, your presence will convince the people with whom he has been keeping contact that you are trying to help undo the wrong that's been done," he pointed out.

Sandras nodded. "Then I'll go with you. Here comes our bus."

HENRY and Sandras ate dinner in Madame Lafarge's boarding house, in St. Odile, after which they went to police headquarters, where Henry notified the local telephone operator to switch all police calls to Jimmy Bourdelon's residence. Then he locked the office and with Sandras started down Main Street toward the bayou.

The bayou road, which was St. Odile's waterfront, was a scene of activity. Craft of various kinds lined the levee, which was piled high with all the paraphernalia needed in the extraction of crude petroleum from the bowels of the earth.

Henry and Sandras walked south on the bayou road to the town limits, where a small clapboard building, surrounded by boats in various stages of construction, stood at the head of a rickety wharf, at the offshore end of which stood a red-painted gasoline pump. On the side of the building facing toward town was painted the legend:

Boats and Fishing Tackle for Rent.
Expert Marine Repairs. Guides Furnished.
Theophile Abadie, Prop."

Henry pushed open the door of the shack, ushered Sandras inside and boomed a greeting to an old man seated at an unpainted

pine table. Without speaking, the ancient rose, waved them to a bench, then filled three cups with black coffee from a tin dripper set on a small oil stove in one corner of the room. Having thus fulfilled the requirements of bayou hospitality, he sat down again and regarded Sandras with twinkling, black eyes.

"So," he quavered, turning to Henry, "you have come to ask about that Octave Beaujean, yes?"

"You're quite right, old man," Henry admitted. He took a sip of coffee that would have taken the hair off a dog's back, set his cup on the table and looked steadily at the old boat builder, whose little office was known to be a sounding board for all the grapevine rumors drifting up from the marshes.

Old Abadie showed toothless gums in a cackling laugh. "One can surmise that much. But when you find Octave—what then?"

Henry lifted his shoulders level with his ears in a shrug. He lowered them again and drawled, "He is free as the air. Moreover, he will be granted compensation for his time in prison."

Abadie gestured with his coffee cup in hand, slopping most of the coffee over the table. "But he will be punished for escaping, no?"

"No," Henry assured him, adding, "Of course, he will have to surrender to the sheriff. I don't think it would be necessary for him to spend even an hour in custody."

Abadie raked the silvery bristle on his wide chin with the tip of a calloused forefinger. "One shouldn't think so," he said musingly, "since that one isn't guilty of any crime." He added, "You'll need a skiff and a gazzoleen, yes?"

"The best you have, *mon vieux*," Henry told him.

The old boatbuilder rose. "When you see Telesfore Babin, give him my regards," he said.

Henry glared. "How in the name of a turtle did you know I was going to Ile d'Argile?" he demanded. "I didn't tell you."

Abadie chuckled. "No?" He grinned at Henry and moved toward the door. "We must see about that skiff."

Ten minutes later Henry and Sandras shoved off from Abadie's wharf in a light skiff and headed down Bayou Papillon to-

ward Pointe Derniere. Thinking back over his recent interview with the old boatbuilder, Henry sensed the hidden meaning in the ancient's request that his regards be conveyed to Telesfore Babin, the unofficial mayor of the tiny fishing and trapping settlement a few miles south of the point. It was, Henry realized, a roundabout way of telling him that Babin could supply information concerning the whereabouts of the elusive Beaujean. Aware that no marsh dweller would openly co-operate with the law, Henry was prepared for more double talk when he reached the clay outcropping known as Ide d' Argile.

A few miles south of Pointe Derniere, Henry ran the skiff alongside a ramshackle wharf draped with fishing nets, made fast the painter to a piling and clambered ashore, followed by Sandras. Pausing at the inshore end of the pier, they looked over a scene of devastation. Many of the houses were unroofed. Many more were total wrecks. Dozens of uprooted chinaberry trees, all lying toward the northwest, bore mute testimony to the fury of the hurricane that had roared over Southern Louisiana less than a month before.

EVERYONE in the tiny settlement was at work. Men and women alike wielded saw and hammer in an effort to repair the damage wrought by the blow. No one paid any attention to Henry and Sandras. Finally a man emerged from one of the wrecked buildings and came toward them.

"Bon' jou', Henri!" he greeted. "Comment ça va?"

"Bo' jou', Telesfore!" Henry responded. "You are well?"

"Tres bien, merci," Telesfore Babin assured him. "You will come to my house for coffee, yes?"

"With pleasure," Henry bowed his acceptance, aware that no business would be transacted until the amenities had been observed. As they walked toward one of the few undamaged houses, he added in a casual tone, "Theophile Abadie sends you his regards."

"Ah, that Theophile!" Babin murmured, after a sharp glance at Sandras. He was a wizened old fellow, with a thin, supple body that suggested rawhide stretched on a steel frame. He said no more until they were

seated on the shelf-like galerie of his house which, like all the other houses in the settlement, was unpainted, its boards weathered by rain and sun to a silvery gray.

An old woman, with a face brown and wrinkled as a walnut shell, brought three cups of coffee on a small tray. She smiled at Henry, passed the coffee around and retired. As the door closed behind her, Babin remarked:

"Octave Beaujean will be relieved to learn that his innocence has been established. Yes."

Henry smiled at him over the rim of his coffee cup, realizing that the grapevine had been working overtime. He doubted that Babin had ever seen Claude Sandras before. Yet the old man had recognized him at once.

Henry said: "I am trying to contact Octave, to tell him the news."

Babin took a sip of coffee, then declared: "That Octave, he was here."

Henry refrained from asking where Beaujean was, knowing that he wouldn't receive a direct answer. He looked out across the bayou, his gaze traveling over the vast sea of grass that stretched away into the blue haze of distance; an eye-wearying monotony of green, treaded by innumerable canals which looked like turquoise ribbons under the clear blue of the October sky, its flatness broken only by an occasional cheniere crowned with stunted, wind-tortured oaks.

A few miles to eastward, a large building towered above the surrounding greenery, seeming by some freak of lightning to float in the air above the waving grass tops.

"Ah," Henry remarked, "I see that the old d'Orgenois place weathered one more hurricane."

Telesfore Babin nodded his grizzled head. "That place has weathered more storms than you and I have years. It now has a tenant, yes."

That, Henry realized, was double talk—Babin's way of telling him that Octave Beaujean was living in the deserted mansion.

"Not even the present housing shortage could make that old bat roost seem attractive," he said. "So far as I know, it hasn't been occupied by the d'Orgenois family in fifty years."

The old man looked reflectively toward

the distant building and said: "One lived there in Nineteen Forty-four." He cocked an eye skyward and seemed to be studying a bank of puff-ball Gulf clouds. "A Yonkee, he was—a big man, with blond hair and blue eyes, with a deformed nail on his left thumb. He contracted with me to deliver food and water to him once a week. But he did not stay long."

"No?" Henry prompted, wondering what all this was leading up to.

"He came down the bayou in a skiff, with two large suitcases," Babin went on reminiscingly. "That was in December, Nineteen Forty-four. In January, Nineteen Forty-five, he went on a visit to New Orleans, and I never saw him again."

"So?" Henry drawled. "He just got tired of living in that old place and left, yes?"

Babin shrugged. "He didn't have his two suitcases with him in the skiff when he stopped here on his way up the bayou, to tell me he was going up to the city. A week later, I took some provisions and water over to the old place. But he wasn't there. Neither were his suitcases." He looked skyward again and added, "He was writing a book."

"You searched for the suitcases, yes?" Henry queried.

Babin threw out both hands in a shrug. "I did, and found nothing."

Henry stroked his mustache and mentally digested this seemingly irrelevant item of information, wondering what it had to do with Octave Beaujean. There was, he realized, something suspicious in a total stranger's occupying the old mansion. People who feel the urge to write books don't move in with the rats, bats and owls.

"I am not interested in what happened back in Nineteen Forty-five," he declared. "Just now I am interested only in getting word to Octave Beaujean that he no longer is wanted by the law."

Babin looked him straight in the eye. "We do not know where Octave is," he declared with unexpected frankness. "He came here on Wednesday, a week ago, stayed until Friday night and then left. He hasn't been back since."

Henry toyed with his mustache and dissected the old man's statement. The state penitentiary is situated at Angola, in West Feliciana Parish, and is only a few miles

from the Mississippi state line. From Angola to Ile d'Argile was more than one hundred and fifty miles. Yet Beaujean had made it in less than a week. Which suggested that he had been helped.

"You know where he went, yes?" Henry asked.

The old man shook his head. "It was after he left here that we noticed lights about the old place yonder," he said.

More double talk, Henry thought. He swallowed the last of his coffee, placed the empty cup on a shelf by the door and rose, convinced that Octave Beaujean was hiding in the old mansion. He said:

"If Octave should return here, he will learn the good news from you. In the meantime, I'll look over the old place." He nodded to Sandras. "Let's be gone."

THHEY shoved off from Ile d'Argile and ran down the bayou for several miles. Presently, Henry swung the skiff into a wide canal which looped in a northeasterly direction through the marsh, finally widening to the dimensions of a long, narrow lake, at the upper end of which the old house rose like a bedraggled ghost from a jungle of roseaux cane.

As he steered the boat through a channel that wound among mats of granavola, Henry made a mental note to come again, for the lake was a veritable sportsman's paradise. It was still too early for the great bird migrations, but in a few weeks at most the lake would be crowded with feathered life. Now only a few flocks of summer ducks and *poules d'eaux* skimmed among the floating islands of granavola. Looking over the gunwale, he could see thousands of fish feeding among the trailing roots of the beautiful water lilies.

There were trout and catfish, perch and barfish and gaspergou, evidence that the lake hadn't been fished in years.

Henry looked ahead at the old house, which seemed oddly out of place in this wilderness. Once it had stood among broad fields of waving sugar cane, until the geologic change, ever present in the *terre tremblant*, had brought about a subsidence of the underlying strata, which had resulted in the flooding of the once fertile acres. The plantation, its lands waterlogged, had reverted to nature, and roseaux cane had

taken over the now sinking cheniere upon which the plantation buildings stood.

Shutting off the motor, Henry let the skiff coast bow-on to a comparatively solid patch of earth, from which a rotting boardwalk led toward the front steps of the house a hundred feet away. Outwardly, the old mansion seemed to be undamaged. Its lower story—called the basement in lower Louisiana—was constructed of brick, and originally had risen twelve feet above the ground into which it was now slowly sinking. The upper story was of cypress, long unpainted and now weathered to a dull gray, and set back to form a wide gallery which, together with the dormed roof, was supported by square pillars, a distinguishing mark of the French colonial type of architecture. Behind it stood what remained of the slave quarters and the sugar houses, their brick walls riven by the encroaching cane.

Henry tied the painter to a clump of cane and stepped ashore, stopping for a moment to peer at the stern of another skiff projecting from the tall grass a few yards away.

Followed by Sandras, he went on toward the house, satisfied that someone was in the old building. The warped boards made squishing noises as they were pressed into the waterlogged ground by the weight of the two men. Climbing the crumbling brick steps, Henry crossed the wide gallery and pushed open the massive front door.

"Well!" a female voice boomed through the cavernous living room. "I like that!"

The windows had been boarded up, and the interior was in semi-darkness. Because of the gloom, Henry didn't at once locate the owner of the voice. Standing on the threshold, he peered about the vast living room, the floor of which was ankle deep in plaster fallen from the ceiling. To his left, he saw a circular staircase, now sagging dangerously, reaching toward the floor above. The mouldering wallpaper, where it wasn't hanging in festoons, showed brighter patches where pictures once had hung, while above the fireplace, flat against the wall, was a huge frame, its gilding tarnished to a rusty brown. Henry found himself wondering absently why it, too, hadn't been removed with the rest of the furnishings.

When his vision became fully conditioned to the gloom, he saw that the room was being used as a camp by three persons, for

three army cots, each covered with a mosquito bar, were ranged along one wall. On a makeshift table constructed of driftwood stood a primus stove, together with cups and saucers, plates and several cooking utensils. An orange crate nailed against one wall held a supply of canned goods. At the rear of the room two massive swinging doors gave access to what once had been the dining room. In the center of each of the swinging doors was an empty oval which once had held a mirror.

Henry took in all these details in a sweeping glance before he saw the woman coming toward him, a small, well-rounded figure in blue silk slacks, stepping daintily over the littered floor.

"What's the idea of busting in here?" she demanded, her heavy-lidded blue eyes blazing angrily. "You have no right—" "We are the law," Henry cut short her tirade.

Her right hand jerked involuntarily to her bosom. Then she recovered her composure, brought her hand to her mouth and tapped her lips daintily with her fingers, as though suppressing a yawn.

"I still say you have no right to break in on a lady," she insisted.

Henry studied her, his glance sweeping from the brassy up-sweep piled on the top of her small head, to the dainty wedgies that encased her tiny feet. He saw that she was older than he first had thought her to be, and realized that she must be at least thirty-five. He perceived, also, that she was heavily made up.

"If the lady will explain w'at she is doing in a place lak' this," he suggested, "mcbbe we tell her why we bus' in. Yes."

She fluttered her eyelashes and smiled coquettishly. "We're just waiting here for the duck season to open," she explained. "Any harm in that?"

Henry stroked his mustache and frowned judicially. "Reckon not," he agreed. "W'e're y'all from?"

"We're from New Orleans," she told him. "The name is Wells, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wells. Satisfied?"

Henry wasn't quite satisfied. He sniffed the dank odor of decay that filled the old mansion and wondered at the enthusiasm that would force anyone to camp in the ruin merely for the sake of an early go at

the ducks and geese. To him, it simply didn't make sense.

He looked at the woman, who was staring at Sandras, her heavy-lidded blue eyes fastened on his face.

"Are you, also, a policeman?" she asked.

The little man beamed fatuously. "Not me, lady," he assured her. "I'm jus' helping Cap'n Henry look fo' a—"

Henry cut him off sharply. Turning to the woman, he asked, "W'ere is yo' bos-ban?"

"I'm sorry," she said, fluttering her eyelashes at him. "He had to go up to the city on urgent business. He'll be back some time tomorrow."

HE TURNED as the doors leading to the dining room opened with a dismal creak of long unoiled hinges. An old woman pushed through into the living room, a little, round-shouldered wisp of a woman, with furtive gray eyes in a brown, wrinkled face. She advanced to where they were standing, fixed her eyes on Henry's belt buckle and inquired in a hoarse voice:

"Who are these guys?"

"Policemen, Aunt Penny," the younger woman explained. "It seems that someone complained about us living here—"

"That ain't right," Henry interrupted. "Nobody made any complaint. We're looking fo' a feller name' Octave Beaujean, who escape' from the state penitentiary a few weeks back. We thought he might be hiding here. Yes."

Without another word, the old woman turned and shuffled back the way she had come. As the swinging doors creaked to behind her, the younger woman said:

"I believe I read something about that in the papers. He was in for murder, wasn't he?"

"Thass right," Henry confirmed. "We had info'mation that he was hiding out 'roun' here."

Her eyes widened in apprehension. "Good Heavens! And we're all alone here, Aunt Penny and I!" She looked at Sandras and asked, "Is he the one who shot that man in Sellerville last night? I heard about it on the radio."

Before Henry could stop him, Sandras spoke up. "Not him," he denied. "I was right there, me, and saw that shootin'. I

saw the killer right face to face, and I know he wasn't Octave Beaujean."

"Oh, you recognized him?" she queried archly.

"Sho' did," Sandras boasted. "Me, I'd know that wan a hundred years from now. Yes."

Henry opened his mouth to speak, then closed it suddenly as a thunderous boom rolled through the old house. Through the unglazed oval in one of the swinging doors he could see through the dimly lighted dining room to the back gallery, where the old woman was beating with a padded stick on the bottom of a huge galvanized iron washtub suspended from the rafters overhead.

The empty mansion seemed to quiver as the old woman's improvised drumstick slammed again and again against the bottom of the suspended tub, beating out a tinny thunder that sounded like artillery drumfire, while she sang to the booming accompaniment. Henry couldn't identify the song. He could only hear her voice, which ranged from a dismal croak to a cracked treble, suggesting a banshee with laryngitis.

"*Ma foi!*" He looked blankly at the younger woman and shouted to make himself heard above the din. "Waffo' she's mak' all that racket?"

The woman raised a languid hand and patted her back hair. "She's just doing her music lesson," she explained, adding wearily, "It's rather embarrassing at times. But the poor old thing seems to get a lot of pleasure out of it."

"Ha!" Henry said explosively. "I leave you to enjoy it. Sorry we bother y'all. Come on!" He grabbed Sandras by the arm and urged him from the old house and along the boardwalk to the skiff, with the old woman's bizarre musical performance still assailing his ear drums.

Sandras unbent the painter and shoved off. Seating himself on the midship thwart, he looked back at the house and guffawed:

"Music lesson! Haw!"

Henry grasped the starting lanyard and jerked the motor to life, then sat down and headed the skiff across the lake toward the canal leading to the bayou.

"That po' ol' woman!" he murmured, shaking his head sadly. "Craz-ee, jus' lak' the bedbug. Yes."

THE following day was a day of dreary routine. After reporting to Fontenette on the failure of his mission to Ile d'Argile, Henry sensed from the district attorney's manner that he was beginning to lose interest in the shotgun murder. For one thing, the victim had been a stranger, without relatives in the parish to keep the D. A. prodded to action. Accordingly, Henry feared that unless he soon found a worthwhile lead, Fontenette would allow the case to be passed to the files, there to languish until it eventually would be forgotten.

All through the forenoon he waited patiently for a report on the two sets of fingerprints. A copy of each set had been mailed to the state police, to the New Orleans police and to the F. B. I. field office in the city, this last in the hope that his friend, Dan Corrigan, would report by telephone rather than by mail.

Reluctant to go beyond earshot of his telephone, Henry ate lunch downtown. He loafed through the afternoon, momentarily expecting a call from Corrigan. At six o'clock he switched on the street lights and sat down to wait for Jimmy to take over for the night, satisfied that no report on the fingerprints would come until the following day.

Suddenly the telephone bell filled the little office with its strident jangle. Henry's dark eyes lighted with anticipation as he snatched up the receiver and drawled:

"Po-lice, yes?"

A woman's voice was chattering hysterically in the receiver.

"My nephew, he is dead. Hurry—"

"Arretez!" he cut short her hysterical rush of words. "Who's calling?"

"My nephew—dead—"

"Un moment," he interrupted, "Calm yourself and tell me just who is your nephew?"

"Claude Sandras," she shrilled. "Someone called him to the door and shot him down—"

"I'm coming," Henry cut her off. "Don't touch anything until we get there."

He slammed down the receiver, lifted it again and called Dr. Couriere. "Claude Sandras shot," he informed the local medical examiner and deputy coroner. "He lives with his aunt in Cannery Town. Can you start at once?"

"I'm on my way," Couriere declared.

HENRY replaced the receiver, scribbled a note to Jimmy and laid it on the blotter. He then ran around the building to the garage in the alley, flung wide the garage doors and climbed in behind the wheel of the ancient jalopy that served St. Odile as its official police car. Backing the car into the alley, he headed it down Main Street toward the bayou.

Clattering like a barrel of loose hardware, the old car shimmied across the bridge and north along the highway for about a hundred yards. As he slowed for a turn into a narrow street of shotgun style houses, the headlights of another car flashed into life from the deep shadows beneath a spreading magnolia a few hundred yards north of the turn. Suddenly the motor of the police car quit with a protesting gurgle.

Henry swore under his breath as he tramped on the starter and jiggled the choke. The heat inside the car was stifling, since neither of the windows could be rolled down because of the warped doors. The only means of ventilation was a hole in the windshield directly above the wheel.

The beams of another pair of headlights swept over the stalled car as a small, black coupe came bouncing across the bridge. As it slowed for the turn, Henry recognized Dr. Couriere's car. He opened the door and waved the doctor on, then resumed his attempt to bring the motor of his car back to life.

Suddenly the engine came alive with a bellow. As Henry swung the jalopy left into Cannery Town, he saw a black roadster bearing down the highway like a roaring juggernaut, headed straight toward the decrepit police car. Instinctively, he recognized it as the car which had started from beneath the magnolia a second or two before.

"*Ma foi!*" he muttered angrily, as he straightened the wheel and headed down the long street in the wake of the doctor's car, "That species of imbecile needs some driving lessons."

The roadster made a screeching turn into Cannery Town and came roaring after the jalopy. Peering into the driving mirror, Henry grew suddenly tense when he saw a slim, dark object projecting from the right hand window of the onrushing car.

Remembering what had happened in front of the Golden Cat two nights before, he slid to the floor. Keeping his right hand on the wheel, while with his left he pressed down hard on the accelerator pedal, he crowded in under the dash and prayed that no innocent person would get in the way of the police car.

The roadster swung left, rushed ahead, then slowed to keep pace with the jalopy, running fender to fender with the police car. Henry jerked his hand away from the wheel an instant before the left window crashed inward before a charge of buckshot.

With glass showering his head and shoulders, Henry lifted his left hand from the accelerator pedal and with his right jammed the brake pedal against the floor boards. The jalopy stopped with a chattering jar. The roadster swept onward. Bouncing back on the seat, Henry jerked his six-shooter from the scabbard, poked the muzzle through the hole in the windshield and sent two bullets crashing through the rear view panel of the black car. He saw the glass of the panel disintegrate in scintillating shards, saw the roadster swerve toward a tree on the parking, and held his breath while he waited for it to crash.

The roadster straightened barely in time, roared down the block to the next intersection, made the turn on two wheels and went thundering north.

HENRY leaned over the wheel, trembling, as he listened to the exhaust fade away in the distance. He realized that pursuit would be futile. Even to broadcast an alarm could do little good, since he suspected that the roadster had been "borrowed" for the job.

He took off his hat, pulled a wadded bandanna from the crown and mopped his face, only now realizing how closely death had brushed him.

"*Ma foi!*" He blew out his mustache in a gusty sigh of relief. "That one, whoever he is, certainly tries to play rough. Yes."

He started the jalopy again and drove along the street until he saw an excited crowd jammed in the tiny dooryard of a house. Slanting his car in against the banquette, he climbed out and pushed his way through the throng.

Inside the house, he found Dr. Couriere

working over Sandras. Henry saw that the much traveled young man was far from dead, but was regarding the doctor with pain filled eyes, his oversize nose and undersized chin making him look more than ever like a scared rabbit.

"How bad is it, Doc?" Henry asked.

The doctor shrugged. "He'll live. He took two bullets, one in the right shoulder, the other in the right side. We've got to get him over to my place. Call the ambulance."

Henry bulled his way through the crowd, ran across the street to a grocery store and called Wilkes' undertaking establishment. He waited until the ambulance arrived, helped lift Sandras into the vehicle and then dispersed the gathering.

He re-entered the house, where Sandras' aunt, a frail, little woman, with patient eyes and work-worn hands, was slumped in an ancient rocker. Henry asked:

"Do you know who shot Claude?"

"No," she denied. "I was in the kitchen, when I heard someone call his name. I heard him open the door. And then the shots."

She closed her eyes, as if she were trying to recall something to memory, then added, "I heard a car start up."

"That's all you know, yes?"

She shrugged. "That's all I know definitely. Perhaps the woman who came looking for Claude shortly after dark may have been—"

"A woman?" Henry interrupted. "Do you remember what she looked like?"

Armontine Duclos opened her eyes and looked straight at him.

"I remember her well," she declared, "because she wore a shirt and trousers, just like a man, and had her hair covered with a blue turban. She asked if Claude Sandras lived here. When I told her he was over in town, and would be back about six, she thanked me and walked toward a car parked near the end of the block. She had bright hair and blue eyes."

"That's all I wanted to know," Henry declared.

He left the house, climbed into his jalopy and drove back across the bridge to the town hall.

When he entered headquarters a few minutes later, he found that Jimmy

Bourdelon had taken over for the night. The ex-marine asked:

"What happened?"

"Sandras, he got shot," Henry went on to tell of the attempt on the young man's life. "He's over in Doc Couriere's private hospital."

He walked to the filing cabinet, took out a cup and filled it with coffee. He moved behind the desk, sat down in his swivel chair and between sips told of the attempt upon himself.

"Name of a fish!" Jimmy always expressed his feelings in French whenever he was startled. "Just like New York or Chicago. What have those places got that we haven't got?" He looked gravely at Henry and asked in English, "Think it might have been Beaujean?"

HENRY shrugged. "I got me a hunch that this beezness is bigger than Beaujean. Beeg-beeg-yes. If he's got any part in it, him, it is jus' a ver-ee small part." He looked at some papers on the desk and asked, "Wass this?"

"I forgot to tell you Corrigan called from the city," Jimmy said. "Those are notes on our conversation. I'll read 'em to you."

He picked up the papers, which were leaves torn from the desk scratch pad. "The prints on the shotgun cartridges," he began, "were made by one Guy Pastorek. Convicted twice on bum check charges, once under Federal Stolen Property Act. Description: Age, thirty-five; height, five-seven; weight, one-forty; hair, brown, thin in front; eyes, blue-gray; face, long, bony; complexion, ruddy; marks, mole on right side of neck below collar, scar on back of right hand."

He paused and looked across the desk at Henry. "Reckon that's your shotgun killer, all right."

"Thass about the description of that feller I saw looking into *Le Chat d'Or*, all right," Henry confirmed. "But the pattern ain't right. It is mos' onusual fo' a swindler to turn killer. Yes."

The ex-marine grinned. "Maybe that's why he used a shotgun. So he'd be more or less sure of hitting what he aimed at. That Sandras shooting indicates he was far from being expert with a pistol."

Henry nodded. "W'at about that other feller?"

Jimmy consulted his notes. "He was Dave Harter, alias Hap Harter, wanted in connection with the robbery of the First National Bank in Letellier, Louisiana. Description: age, thirty-two; height, five-four; weight, one-thirty-five; hair, dark; eyes, brown; complexion, sallow; features, face, narrow, with prominent nose. No known marks or disfigurements."

"Thass the daid wan all right," Henry agreed. "There is mo', yes?"

Jimmy grinned. "And how! Listen. Pete Vranken, alias Strangler, also wanted in connection of robbery of First National Bank, Letellier, Louisiana. Description: Age, forty-one; height, five-eleven; weight, one sixty-five; hair, reddish blond; eyes, chestnut brown; complexion, ruddy; This man has unusually large hands and feet. Has no distinguishing marks or disfigurements.

Harter and Vranken were associated with one Ed. Tarber, alias Big Ed, in Letellier's bank robbery, which netted them three hundred thousand dollars in cash. Three weeks after the robbery, Talbert was arrested in New Orleans. Brought to trial, he was sentenced to twenty years in the state penitentiary. One year after entering pen he was shot while attempting to escape. He died one week later in prison hospital. So far, the money has not been removed."

Jimmy laid the final page on the desk and looked at Henry. "Well, there you have it."

Henry grinned. "At las'," he drawled, "this beezness she's begin to mak' some sense. Reckon, me, this calls fo' another visit to the ol' d'Orgenois place. Yes."

Rising, he closed and locked the front door. Then he opened a locker and took out a pair of faded dungaree trousers, a dungaree jumper, a wide-brimmed palmetto fiber hat and a pair of knee-length laced boots.

"You're not going down there alone, I hope?" Jimmy said, as Henry began to remove his police uniform.

"Pourquoi non?" Henry asked, pulling on the dungaree trousers.

"You might at least take a squad of deputies along," Jimmy argued.

Henry snorted and pulled on the high-laced boots. "Debbities!"

"W'at f' I should encumber maself wit' a gang of knuckleheads?"

Jimmy waited until Henry knotted the

laces of the knee-length boots and stood up. Then he warned:

"You know the kind of people you're going up against."

Henry shrugged into the dungaree jumper. "I don't aim to go up against anywan," he declared. "I aim to jus' scout around and see w'at I can fin' out, me. They's a lot mo' to this bizzness than is show on the surface. Yes."

He removed the shoulder strap of his Sam Browne belt and buckled the belt around his waist. As he reloaded his six-shooter, he continued, "Octave Beaujean, he was orderly in the prison hospital. Beeg Ed Tarber, he died in the hospital. Later, somebody helps Octave bus' outa prison. Now all that ain't jus' coincidence."

The ex-marine nodded. "I see what you mean," he said. "Just the same, I don't like the idea of your going it alone."

"If I took some of Vicou's bright young men wit' me," Henry pointed out, "I might jus' as well hire me a brass band." He took a .45 caliber automatic from a desk drawer and thrust it inside the waistband of his trousers. Next, he lifted a big flashlight from the top of the filing cabinet and hooked it on his belt. Then he put on the palmetto fiber hat. "Well, I'm on ma way, me. If I ain't back befo' daylight, call Vicou and ask him to send a posse after me. Thassall. *Au 'voir!*"

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later, Henry shut off the motor and ran his rented skiff alongside the wharf at Ile d' Argile. The tiny settlement was almost obscured by a haze of pungent smoke from dozens of smudges placed at strategic points to keep away the mosquitoes. Everyone was indoors. From one of the houses came a scratchy rendition of Alexander's Ragtime Band being played on a phonograph.

Climbing out of the skiff, Henry walked up to the house of Telesfore Babin and rapped on the gallery floor. The door came open, and the "mayor" thrust an inquiring head past the door frame.

"Who's there?" he demanded. "Ah, it is Capitaine Henri."

"A word with you, *mon cher* Telesfore," Henry whispered.

Babin glanced behind him into the room, then eased out on the gallery and closed the

door softly after him. "What is it?" he whispered.

"Claude Sandras was shot and seriously wounded a while ago," Henry told him. "I have reason to believe that the would-be assassins came this way."

"Not my people?" the "mayor" of Ile d' Argile denied. "None of them would have any reason to kill that Sandras."

"I don't mean your people," Henry declared. "I want you to tell me if you saw a boat containing two persons pass down the bayou within the past two hours."

"Yes," Babin confirmed. "There were two skiffs. In the first skiff, a man and a woman; in the second, one man. He passed here only half an hour ago."

"Name of a turtle!" Henry muttered, suddenly regretful that he hadn't asked for a posse. Aloud, he said, "Perhaps this lone man wasn't going where the couple went."

"He stopped here and asked the way to the old d'Orgenois place," Babin revealed. "A tall man, he was, with red hair and very large hands. A Yonkee. Yes."

"So?" Henry stroked his mustache and looked thoughtfully out over the marsh, wishing again that he had taken Jimmy's advice and called for a posse. But, now that he had come so far, his pride wouldn't allow him to turn back. He shrugged and said, "Well, at least one can find out what they're doing in the old place. Thanks."

He returned to the skiff, shoved off and continued on down the bayou, reviewing in his mind the information telephoned to him by Corrigan. It was now obvious that the big, blond "Yonkee" who had lived in the d'Orgenois place back in Nineteen Forty-four had been none other than the bank robber, Ed. Tarbert. The fact that Tarbert later had died in the prison hospital, where Octave Beaujean had served as an orderly, coupled with the fact that the loot had never been recovered, brought up an interesting question:

Was Octave Beaujean connected with the couple now occupying the old house?

Henry was turning that question over in his mind when he swung the skiff into the canal and shut off the motor. At first, his plan had been simple—to take the occupants of the house by surprise and place them under arrest. But the fact that Vranken, too, was on their trail, doubtless to avenge

the murder of Harter, threatened to complicate matters.

With the coming of night, an uncanny silence had settled over the marshes, which seemed only to be emphasized by the furtive stirrings of small furred creatures in the tall grass, and the steady drone of a multitude of insect voices. A gentle breeze blowing in off the Gulf carried the salty breath of the open sea, blended with tang of drying seaweed and the dank odor of decaying vegetation which is the ever-present scent of the *terre tremblant*.

Henry unshipped the outboard motor, laid it on the bottom boards, then set the oars against their thole pins and started rowing through the canal, facing forward, fisherman style. When he reached the lake he slanted the skiff toward the dense shadows of the reeds growing along the margin, discarded one of the oars and poled with the other until he came within a hundred yards of the house. Then he sat down on the midship thwart and looked toward the building, his eyes probing the shadows.

Before him, the old house rose above the encroaching canebrake, silent and dark, its boarded-up windows blank, dead eyes in its gray, weathered face, its sagging roof highlighted by the slanting moonbeams. Henry waited, his eyes alert for some sign of life about the place. A fish rose to snap at some night-flying insect and dropped back with a splash. A school of tiny gambusinos stirred foamy ripples on the surface as they scattered before the voracious rush of a hungry trout. Somewhere among the reeds a duck whistled in alarm, its rest disturbed by some furred marauder. The air was filled with the shrill whine of mosquitoes. But from the house there was no sound.

Wondering if his quarry had decamped, Henry poled the boat nearer the head of the lake. When he reached the spot where he had moored his skiff the day before, he saw two skiffs, both equipped with outboard motors. Drawing his boat alongside the other two craft, Henry passed a hand over both motors and discovered that one was still warm.

He climbed out of the skiff and crept stealthily along the boardwalk until he reached the front steps. Then he turned left and moved cautiously around the building. When he reached the back gallery, he

saw a light flickering through the canebrake about a quarter of a mile beyond the slave quarters.

Drawing his six-shooter, he followed a path which led through the canebrake, past the slave cabins and the old sugar houses and on into the dense jungle beyond. Green cane stems carpeting the ground indicated that the path recently had been cut through the almost impassable growth. Why anyone should have gone to all this trouble, Henry couldn't even guess. Puzzled, he crept along the narrow runway, stepping gently on the carpet of cane stems, which crackled like dry leaves beneath his feet.

Suddenly the path ended in a small clearing, in the center of which stood an old tomb. Henry drew back in the shadows and stared at the mausoleum standing forlornly in the canebrake, its marble walls feebly reflecting the moonlight. It was about ten feet high, steep-roofed, its pointed gable surmounted by an ornately wrought iron cross, below which was carved the inscription "D' ORGENOIS."

Looking upward, he saw a shaft of light wavering in the air above the peaked roof of the tomb. From within the mausoleum there came a confused murmur of voices. Henry circled the vault. When he reached its north side, he saw that the light came from a hole in the slab roof.

Suddenly a long-drawn yell of anguish rose above the mutter of voices. A babble of words followed the cry, loud words, angry words liberally spiced with good round French oaths.

Henry looked upward at the hole in the roof. Now he saw the top of a ladder projecting through the opening. Backing farther into the canebrake, he again reviewed the information furnished him by Corrigan. Added to what he already knew, it made a fairly complete picture.

FOR twenty minutes more, Henry crouched in the canebrake. The sound of voices still drifted upward from the hole in the roof of the tomb, punctuated at intervals by cries of pain. He knew what was happening, knew that sooner or later those now inside the mausoleum must emerge. Until then, he was satisfied to wait.

Presently the shaft of light was blacked out as the head and shoulders of a man rose

above the edge of the opening. He scrambled out on the roof, and a minute later was joined by a woman carrying a gasoline lantern. The woman sat down on the ridge, while the man drew up the ladder and set it at a slant against the side of the tomb. The woman then descended to the ground. The man dragged a slab back into place, closing the hole. Then he climbed down the ladder, lifted it from against the wall of the mausoleum and pitched it among the canes.

Henry fought back a desire to step from cover and place the couple under arrest. He now realized, with a prickly feeling along his spine, that the elusive Pete Vranken must be lurking somewhere about the place. Even at that moment, he could be watching from the surrounding canebrake. If he saw the man and the woman being placed under arrest, he might make common cause with them until the menace of the law was removed. Itching with frustration, Henry watched the couple hurry toward the house, knowing that if he were to succeed in bringing the pair to justice, he must wait until they were joined by Vranken.

First of all, he decided to satisfy his curiosity regarding the identity of the person imprisoned in the old tomb. Dragging the ladder from among the cane, he set it up against the wall of the mausoleum. He circled the edifice, pistol in hand, peering into the surrounding shadows, before he ventured to climb the ladder. Even after reaching the roof, he lay flat and peered over the ridge, his ears attuned to catch the sound of human movement in the canebrake. Not until he was certain that he wasn't being watched did he move the slab aside, lower his flashlight through the hole and press the switch.

Instantly his ears were assailed by a volley of abuse delivered in drawling Cajun French.

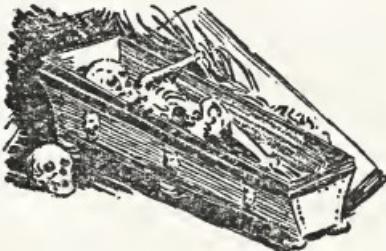
"*Ma foi!*" Henry drawled reprovingly. "Such language!"

He took another look over the surroundings, then switched off his flashlight and stuck it in his belt while he pulled up the ladder and lowered it through the opening. After another quick survey, he descended the ladder.

Switching on his flashlight again, he moved the beam slowly over the interior,

over shattered coffins and scattered bones of several generations of d'Orgenois, before bringing it to rest upon the man who lay, stripped to the waist, upon a coffin, to which he was bound hand and foot.

He was a young man, of pleasing countenance, despite the black stubble that covered his cheeks and chin, or the feverish glow in his black eyes.



He shouted angrily at Henry, then continued in English, "I done tol' y'all w'at you want to know. Quit shine that dam light in ma eyes. You hear?"

"Calm yourself, *mon cher* Octave," Henry soothed. "I, Henri Pou, have come to take you away from here. Yes."

"*Henri Pou!*" the prisoner groaned. "That means a speedy return to Angola."

"*Mais non,*" Henry assured him. Opening his pocket knife, he began cutting through the young man's bonds. As he worked, he told him of Sandras' return. "So you see, instead of being taken back to prison, you will be compensated by the state. So get up, my friend!"

Octave Beaujean struggled painfully to a seat on the coffin and peered blankly at Henry. His forehead and chest were pitted with raw sores, which Henry surmised had been made by the cigarettes whose butts now littered the dank floor of the tomb. The young man muttered:

"I can't believe it. *Non!*"

"But it is true, I assure you," Henry insisted. He climbed the ladder for another look around the clearing, came down again and declared:

"Those pigs were torturing you to make you tell where Big Ed. Tarbert hid the money stolen from the Letellier bank, yes?"

Beaujean didn't answer. He peered past the beam of the flashlight at Henry for more than a minute before he asked:

"How did you know?"

"I know more than you think, *mon ami*," Henry drawled. "Big Ed. died in the prison hospital. You were an orderly. Perhaps he raved and in his delirium revealed his secret. Perhaps he had a last minute repentance and told you. Anyway, you used your knowledge to get someone on the outside to plan your escape, isn't that so?"

"On the contrary," Beaujean denied, "someone on the outside came to me first. The prison grapevine was responsible for that. This Lil Norvell, who was Big Ed's woman, visited me, representing herself as my sister. I shall not tell you how my escape was engineered, because it might get certain people in trouble. But Lil worked it successfully, got me across the Mississippi state line, dressed me from head to foot in new clothes and carried me in her car to New Orleans. That was when that thug joined us."

"Guy Pastorek, yes?" Henry prompted.

BEAUJEAN shrugged. "I see you know him. Well, I wasn't supposed to, because until then he'd kept in the background. Up to that moment, I hadn't reavealed a word of Big Ed's secret, but played the dumb Cajun and pretended I had little knowledge of *l'Anglais*. It wasn't until I overheard Lil and Pastorek planning to ditch me as soon as I told them the location of the money, that I realized I was being played for a sucker.

"You see, before Lil showed up at the pen and sprang her proposition, I'd toyed with the idea of offering Big Ed's secret in exchange for a pardon. But I now figured I'd killed that chance by escaping. So I decided to ditch Lil and Pastorek. That night I slipped out of the rooming house where we were staying and crossed the river to Gretna. There I contacted a certain relative, who arranged for me to be carried south to Houma in a freight truck. In Houma I was further helped—I'm mentioning no names, remember. Anyway, by traveling mostly after dark, I finally reached a place not far from here and rested up for a few days.

"Finally I came over to the old house and started a search for the money. I found it—two suitcases crammed with bills. Now that I had the money, I experienced a

change of heart, and decided that I had no right to it. So I took out two thousand dollars, enough to get me to Canada. Once there, I planned to write the state attorney general and advise him where the money was hidden.

"But Lil must have known that Tarbert once used the old house as a hideout. When I left her in New Orleans, she headed for Sellierville, surmising that I was traveling in that general direction. In the meantime, I felt pretty secure, being unaware that Lil and Pastorek were right on my heels.

"Last Saturday I was paddling a pirogue through the canal, heading back toward the place where I'd been staying. I felt pretty good about everything, for I had two thousand dollars stuffed inside my shirt, and was confident that I soon would be safely out of the country. Then I paddled around a bend in the canal—and there they were, Pastorek, Lil and an old woman I'd never seen before. They were in a skiff, and Pastorek was holding an automatic shotgun on me. Well, it was either give up or have my guts blown out.

"Pastorek ordered me to paddle ahead of them to the house. Once there, they searched me and found the two thousand dollars, which convinced them I'd found Tarbert's cache. I tried to play dumb, and Pastorek poked me in the face. I closed with him and was beating the rat to a pulp, when Lil sapped me. When I woke up I was here in the old tomb, trussed like a chicken for the market.

"Since then, they've been working on me, trying to make me tell. I held out, because I hoped to get loose, sooner or later. But I was tied too well." He shrugged dispiritedly. "Now they'll get away with all that money. I couldn't hold out against them. That's what gets me."

"You needn't let it vex you, *mon vieux*," Henry assured him. "Men have broken under torture before. Pastorek must have been with you yesterday, when that old woman put on that tub-thumping act, yes?"

Beaujean nodded. "That was a signal to warn Pastorek when the law was around. Lil was afraid he'd show up at the house and be recognized as the one who blasted a certain Harter with his shotgun on Tuesday evening."

"I was there and saw the whole affair,"

Henry revealed. "Harter was one of Ed Tarbert's associates in that Letellier bank robbery."

"Pastorek boasted about that," Beaujean declared. "He said that Lil Norvell had lured Harter and one Vranken here for the purpose of killing them. With them dead, there would be none left to put the finger on her."

Henry glanced upward toward the hole in the roof. "We'd better get out of here—it could be a trap. You are able to walk, yes?"

Beaujean struggled painfully to his feet, groaned and fell back on the coffin. "That rat burned the soles of my feet," he declared. "But I can navigate, even if it hurts like hell. Lead on."

"Just a minute," Henry advised. He climbed the ladder and took a look over the clearing. "All right. Come on."

He scrambled out on the roof and waited until the younger man joined him, after which he pulled up the ladder, set it against the outside of the tomb and descended to the ground. When Beaujean climbed painfully down, Henry lowered the ladder and tossed it into the canebrake.

"What now?" Beaujean inquired.

"How long will it take for Pastorek to find the money?" Henry asked him.

The younger man shrugged. "That will depend on what tools he has, and how good he is at house wrecking. I told him where the two suitcases were hidden. But I never told him how to open that hidden closet above the fireplace in the living room."

"Ah!" Henry murmured. "The door is concealed behind a picture frame fixed flat against the wall, yes?"

"That's right," the younger man admitted. "How did you know?"

"I saw the picture frame yesterday," Henry confessed. "I wondered how it escaped being stolen by vandals. When you mentioned about the money being hidden in a secret closet above the living room fireplace, I realized why the picture frame lay flat against the wall."

"It is iron, and bolted to the closet door in such a manner as to conceal the edges of the door," Beaujean told him. "Unless they discover that the door can be opened by pulling outward on the bottom of the frame, they'll have to cut through the wall." He

peered about him into the shadows. "What do we do next?"

"One of Tarbert's pals, Pete Vranken," Henry warned, "is somewhere about the place."

"He has come for the money, yes?"

"*'Mais oui.* Also, he comes to avenge his pal, Harter. But he wouldn't think twice about cooperating with Pastorek and Lil against us."

"How can I help?"

Henry shrugged. "There is little you can do, with those feet. But I'm going on to the house. If anything should go wrong, you could get to the lake, take one of the skiffs and run up to Ile d' Argile and warn Babin and his men to block off the canal until a sheriff's posse arrives after daylight."

"I'll do that," Beaujean promised.

Henry felt the automatic stuck inside the waistband of his trousers and considered the wisdom of letting Beaujean have the weapon. He wanted, if possible, to take Pastorek alive, believing that every accused person had the right to a trial. But he feared that Beaujean, resentful of his treatment by Pastorek, might shoot the fellow on sight."

"You were thinking of something, yes?" Beaujean queried.

"I was," Henry admitted, "but I decided it wasn't practical. *Venez donc.*"

HE TURNED and headed along the run-down way cut through the canebrake, with Beaujean hobbling painfully at his heels. When he reached the slave cabins, he paused, listening to sounds of hammering echoing through the old house. Beaujean limped up behind him and whispered:

"They haven't yet got their hands on that money."

Henry nodded. "So it would seem." He looked over the surroundings. The moon was now directly overhead, and the weed-grown space between the slave quarters and the back gallery was flooded with light.

"How can one reach the second floor without being heard or seen?" he inquired.

"Through the basement," the other revealed. "A brick stairs ascends to the dining room."

"All right. I'm going ahead. Don't follow until I reach the basement. And at all times stay about fifty feet behind me. And try to avoid being seen. If I slip, run for

it and get Babin to block the canal and keep these scoundrels from escaping. Understand?"

"*Je comprends.*"

Henry scuttled across the moonlit space, bent almost double, his feet swishing softly through the knee-high weeds. Reaching the basement door, he ducked inside, turned around and watched Beaujean crawl toward the house on hands and knees.

Henry listened intently, trying to distinguish other sounds through the din of hammering that came from the floor above. Satisfied that he was alone in the basement, he unhooked the flashlight from his belt, pressed the switch and swept the white beam of radiance over the walls and ceiling, which were covered with phosphorescent mold. Locating the stairway, he switched off the light and tiptoed through the musty-smelling darkness toward the steps.

Feeling before him for loose bricks, he climbed the stairs, which ended in a small service room. He tiptoed toward the doorway, poked his head around the casing and looked across the huge dining room, which was faintly illuminated by the white glare of a gasoline lantern slanting through the glassless ovals in the swinging doors. Through one of the openings he could see Lil Norvell standing a few feet away, looking upward, her face wreathed in a smile of anticipation.

Drawing his six-shooter, Henry advanced on tiptoe toward the swinging doors, the occasion crunch of fallen plaster beneath his feet blanketed by the noise of hammering that reverberated through the building. Reaching the doors, he stood to one side and looked through one of the ovals into the living room, which was enveloped in a haze of dust.

He saw Pastorek standing on the makeshift table, hacking savagely with a small hatchet at the wall above the fireplace, bringing down showers of plaster which covered him from head to foot with powdered lime. Below him, the blonde woman stood watching his labors. At the opposite end of the room, the old woman sat on an upended suitcase at the foot of the circular stairs and watched through the fog of lime dust.

All at once, Henry was conscious of another presence. Angry at Beaujean for not

remaining in the background, he muttered sternly:

"I warned you to stay fifty feet behind me, old man, now go on down."

With the next breath he realized that it wasn't Beaujean who crouched behind him. For no Beaujean ever owned the huge left hand which clamped with suffocating force over Henry's nose and mouth, nor the equally monstrous right that impacted like a mallet against the base of his skull, snuffing out his consciousness as one would snuff out a candle.

HENRY wasn't out for more than five minutes. He spent another five minutes trying to determine what was happening inside his head, which seemed to be filled with pinwheels, each one shooting out a trail of sparks like the tail of a comet.

Presently the pinwheels stopped whirling and died out. Opening his eyes, Henry discovered that he was lying on his back, and spent more minutes wondering about that. In a vague way he realized that someone was standing over him, shutting off the light of the gasoline lantern slanting through the twin ovals in the swinging doors. The noise of hammering was stilled and, instead, an excited babble of voices drifted from the huge living room.

Suddenly the man above him moved, butted the swinging doors with his shoulder and barged through to the living room, a flat automatic in his right hand, in his left, Henry's long-barreled six-shooter.

"Okay, folks," Henry heard him say. "I'll take over now."

"You can't do this to me, Pete Vranken!" The blonde woman's shrill protest was tinged with hysteria. "I've got a right to my share. You can't take it away—"

"Save it!" A man's voice interrupted. "I'm wise to the whole damn set-up."

Henry rolled over, pushed himself up on hands and knees and shook his head in an attempt to ease the numb feeling at the base of his skull, aware that the rabbit punch had almost broken his neck.

"We aimed to give you and Davie your cut," he heard the woman say.

"Your current fancyman gave Davie his night before last," Vranken snarled. "I'd have got mine if I hadn't moved fast."

Henry pushed himself to his knees and

stared through the oval in the door. He saw the blonde woman and her male companion standing a few feet beyond the swinging doors, their hands held at shoulder level, their eyes fixed apprehensively upon the tall red-head. On the floor at their feet were two large suitcases, one of them open, revealing the bundles of paper money with which it was packed.

"Fella," Vranken stared menacingly at Pastorek, whom Henry now recognized as the man who had looked through the window of the Golden Cat two nights before, "you tried to put both me and Davie on the spot. You got that floozy to entice us down here. For that, you're goin' to pay through the nose. Both of you."

"Listen, for God's sake, Vranken!" Pastorek begged. "Gimme a break. It was her idea from the start. She wanted you and Davie rubbed out, so there'd be none of Big Ed's old gang left. Why, she drove the car—"

"You lousy rat!" the woman shrilled. "You framed the whole business."

Vranken's laugh sounded like a shovel being driven into loose gravel. "Go on," he encouraged, "I like to hear rats squeal."

"Look, Pete," the woman pleaded, "give me a break. Weren't we all in this deal? Didn't I drive the car on that Letellier job? Why, I even cased the bank for a whole week—"

"You cased the job and talked Ed into pullin' it off because you were plannin' to run out on us with the jack," Vranken cut her off. "But Ed was wise to you. He had you figured for what you are—strictly a lady on the make. You aimed to make suckers outa the whole damned bunch."

"You're dead wrong, Pete," she argued desperately. "I played straight with the bunch until Ed ran out on me in New Orleans, leaving me barely enough money to pay my hotel bill. I knew then he was no good, that he was playing all of us for suckers. I tell you I wasn't a bit sorry when he got picked up in New Orleans a few weeks later."

"You put the finger on him for the cops," Vranken accused.

"I didn't," she denied. "I'm not saying I wouldn't have turned him in, after the way he treated me and you boys. And I'll admit I didn't shed any tears when I heard

he'd died in the pokey. I'd figured the money was as good as lost, when Pastorek here came to me with the tip-off that Ed had told that Bowjohn character where he'd stashed the dough.

"I arranged for that guy to check out. That cost me plenty, too. If I hadn't stirred around, picking up a tip here, another there, and helping spring that dopey guy outa the can, that money might have stayed here in this old dump until it mouldered away. Surely, I'm entitled to my cut, after all the trouble I've gone through to locate the money."

"You planned the Letellier job with the sole idea of playin' Ed against me and Davie, and makin' suckers out of the whole damn mob. After we pulled the job and scattered, plannin' to meet in New Orleans in three weeks for the split, you tried to talk Ed into runnin' out on me and Davie. That put Ed wise. From then on, he knew you weren't to be trusted. So he waited until you were outa the hotel and scrammed with the money."

"He wrote Davie, tellin' him he'd run out on you, and that he was takin' the jack to a hide-out of his down in the marsh country. He arranged to meet us in New Orleans in January. Well, you know what happened."

"I had nothing to do with that, Pete," the woman insisted. "I'm entitled to my cut. If I hadn't located the money—"

"All you'll get outa me," Vranken interrupted, "is a slug where it'll hurt most. But first, I'll settle with this rat for what he done to Davie." His huge, red-knuckled right hand came level with his waist and brought the muzzle of his automatic in line with Pastorek's stomach.

"Wait, Pete!" Pastorek screamed. "I didn't want to do it. I swear! It was all her idea. She ribbed me to it. I was always in favor of takin' you guys in—"

THIS sudden bellow of a .45 drowned out his plea. Vranken dropped both guns to the floor and clawed at his chest. He stood swaying, while the old house seemed to vibrate to the echo of the discharge. Then his knees buckled and he slumped to the floor like a length of loose rope.

For a moment no one moved. Pastorek and the woman stood in stunned silence,

looking down at the sprawling figure of Vranken on the floor. Then, slowly, their heads turned toward the staircase. Following their glances, Henry saw the old woman standing at the foot of the stairs, a long-barreled Frontier type revolver still gripped in her right hand.

"I don't reckon that guy'll need any money now," she croaked.

"Good for you, Penny!" the woman screamed joyfully. She swooped toward Vranken's body, came up with both weapons and swung their muzzles to cover the still astounded Pastorek.

"So, you lousy punk, you'd rat on me, would you?" Without moving her eyes from the man, she called to the old woman, "You might as well let him have it, too, Penny."

"You kill your own rats," the old woman grunted. Stooping, she lifted the lid of the suitcase on which she'd been sitting and dropped her gun inside. "If you want that punk rubbed out, you can do it yourself. See?"

"For cryin' out loud, Lil!" Pastorek quavered. "What's got into you, kid?"

"Kid yourself!" Lil snapped. "I knew you'd fold up when the going got tough. Shooting off your mouth to Vranken showed me what you are."

"Aw, for Pete's sake, Lil!" he protested. "I was only stallin' for time. Watchin' for a chance to jump him."

"Don't make me laugh," she snapped. "I knew from the first that you were yellow to the core. You never played it straight with anyone in your life."

"Okay, okay," he surrendered. "So I'm yellow. But I assure you I was playin' for time. Let's split the take right down the middle and forget all the rest."

"You and your split!" She laughed harshly. "Why should I split with a chiseler like you? You know you muscled into the deal, coming to me with word that Ed had told that Bowjohn character where he had cached the money. I took you in only because I knew you'd tip off the cops if I refused."

"But, Lil," Pastorek argued, "you agreed to my proposition. In fact, you acted like you were tickled to death to deal me in."

"Listen, punk," Lil drawled, "I didn't mean it was to be a split down the middle. I was the brains of Ed's mob. I cased the

bank. I made the plans. I drove the car and took charge of the take. But I guess Ed had me figured right, when he claimed I was strictly a lady on the make. So why should I split with you, when I can make the pay-off with a slug?"

"For God's sake, Lil!" he quavered. He brushed a hand over his moist forehead and continued abjectly, "Take all the dough, if you want it that way. My life is worth more to me than all the money in the world. Gimme a break, kid."

"You poor louse!" she sneered. "You're even more yellow than I figured. Listen, when Penny and I walk out of here, there'll be nobody left to connect me with the Letellier job, or with Big Ed's mob." She lifted the automatic in her right hand, obviously nervously to press the trigger.

HENRY decided that matters were getting out of hand. If the woman kept on arguing with Pastorek, working herself up to the killing stage, he realized that he wouldn't be able to bring the fellow to trial.

He looked across the living room, where the old woman still stood at the foot of the circular stairs, her wrinkled face expressionless as she watched the younger woman working herself up for the kill. Behind the stairway another door opened into what once had been the library. Now something was moving in the cavernous darkness beyond the opening. As Henry watched, a bare foot and dungaree-clad leg came into view. Then a bare arm came around the door casing, gently raised the lid of the suitcase and lifted out the old Frontier revolver.

Henry waited no longer. Rising to his feet, he drew the automatic from inside the waistband of his trousers, snapped off the safety catch and barged through the swinging doors. Bouncing like a rubber ball across the living room, he rammed the muzzle of his pistol hard against Lil's spine.

"Drop them goo'!" he barked.

The woman swore, squirmed away from the pressure of the automatic against her spine, then turned, bringing the six-shooter in her left hand almost in line with his body.

"No-no-non!" He snapped. The hard edge of his left hand chopped down on her left wrist. She screamed, dropped the re-

volver, swore again and tried to bring up the automatic. Henry caught the barrel of the pistol with his left hand, forced it toward the ceiling and then rapped the woman's right elbow with his gun. "I done tol' you to drop them gon'," he warned.

She called him an unprintable name as he jerked the automatic from her grip, pushed her away from him and scooped his own six-shooter from the floor.

"Get this lousy copper, Penny!" Lil screamed.

Old Penny turned and dived toward her suitcase. Just then, Beaujean stepped through the doorway of the library, bunted the crone away from the suitcase, then stooped and rummaged through it. Finally he straightened, grinned across the room at Henry and asked:

"How am I doing?"

Henry beamed. "A-one. I am very much obliged."

He turned to Pastorek, who stood there as if frozen in his tracks, apparently so paralyzed with fear that he seemed to be unaware of what was happening. Holstering his six-shooter, Henry drew the handcuffs from his hip pocket, pulled the man and the woman together and manacled them wrist to wrist.

"Bring that old one out where we can watch her," he ordered Beaujean.

The younger man urged the crone to the center of the room and asked, "What next."

"Search him." Henry indicated Pastorek, then warned, "No rough stuff. He is now my prisoner, remember."

Beaujean shrugged and began searching Pastorek, bringing to light a .38 caliber Colt Special, a pocket knife, a handful of small change and a wallet fat with paper money. He handed the pistol to Henry with an apologetic grin.

"This," he declared, "is a souvenir I carried away from Angola."

Henry took the gun and added it to the armament already stuck inside the waistband of his trousers. He said "That gun will be between you and the warden. I have nothing to say about it, one way or the other."

He turned toward the three canvas-bottomed cots ranged along the south wall of the big room and began a painstaking search. He turned up three suitcases, two

containing feminine garments, the other obviously belonging to Pastorek. In addition there were two women's handbags, one of them crammed with paper money, a shotgun in a leather case and a small, pearl-handled revolver.

He sat down on one of the cots, counted the money in the woman's handbag and found that it totalled two thousand four hundred and seventy dollars. Two thousand of this, he put in the open suitcase containing part of the bank loot, and returned the remainder to the handbag.

THROUGHOUT the search, Lil and Pastorek stood, handcuffed together, in the middle of the room, both apparently stunned by the unexpected turn of events, their eyes fixed in a blank stare upon the sprawling corpse of Pete Vranken, which lay on the littered floor, both arms outflung toward the two suitcases, as if he still coveted their contents.

The old woman sat on a window seat, watching Henry with cold, malevolent eyes. As he closed the lid on the suitcase full of money, she croaked:

"Watcha goin' to do with me, copper? I ain't done nothin'. Shootin' a rat in defense o' my niece ain't a crime, is it?"

Henry shrugged. "That is somet'ing the judge mus' decide, Madame.

He shrugged again when she muttered an obscenity. As a matter of fact, he didn't hear her, for he was absorbed in the realization that until that very moment the possibility of a reward hadn't occurred to him.

In all his years as a law-enforcement officer, he had steadfastly refused to accept rewards offered for the apprehension of criminals. But a reward for the recovery of stolen property was an entirely different matter, one without any taint of blood-money. Since taking over as marshal of St. Odile, he had been lucky in this respect, and had built up a tidy sum in government bonds as a sort of emergency fund for himself and Jimmy. Now it looked as if their financial backlog was due to grow some more.

Of course, he admitted, half of the reward must go to Beaujean, for without that young man's help the money might never have been recovered. Furthermore, the state would compensate him for his time in

prison. All in all, Henry told himself, the future looked rosy for young M'sieu' Beaujean. Yes, indeed.

Henry snapped the catches on the money-laden suitcase, set it upright and spoke to Beaujean in French:

"You have just been deputized as a deputy sheriff of Papillon Parish. You will assist me in conveying these so nice people to Sellerville. Also, you will carry this."

Beaujean agreed, picking up the suitcase. "When do we start?"

"*Tout de suite*," Henry told him. He distributed the prisoners' personal suitcases among them and pointed toward the door. "Hokay. Start walking."

Lil held back, jerked Pastorek to a halt by yanking savagely on the handcuffs. Turning to Henry, she fluttered her eyelashes coquettishly and pleaded:

"Look, copper, can't you and I make a deal? After all, I'm just a weak woman who got mixed up with a gang of heels."

Henry stared at her and stuck out his lower lip, only now beginning to grasp the true meaning of the unfamiliar name called her by Vranken—a lady on the make. That, he realized, was exactly what she was, a cunning, grasping woman, who used weak and reckless men to her own selfish ends. And now, he realized with a start of indignation, she was trying to make him.

"*Nome d'une tortue!*" he muttered,

stooping over the body of Vranken to hide his mounting anger. He turned the body over on its back, composed the limbs and then straightened, looked coldly at Lil and drawled:

"Jus' wan po', weak woman, you. Yes. All you done is plan a bank robbery, double-crossed yo' pals, assist in wan murder, and in what almos' was another murder. If all that ain't not'ing, I lak' to hear you explain w'at you really call somet'-ing." He pointed sternly to the door "Now get moving, befo' I lose ma temper and tell you w'at I really think of you."

She spat out an obscenity, jerked the handcuffs with such force that she almost pulled the still dazed Pastorek off his feet.

"Come on, you dopey punk," she shrilled. "We're on our way to the hot seat."

Old Penny shuffled along behind them, her wrinkled face expressionless as a peeled banana.

Henry took a last look over the room. Vranken's body would have to remain until Wilkes, the undertaker, came for it. He extinguished the gasoline lantern, picked up the remaining suitcase and followed his prisoners from the house and along the rotting boardwalk to the boat landing, his mind now busy with a problem in arithmetic concerning ten per cent of three hundred thousand divided by two.



*You Never Know About These Howlin' Wolves from
New Hampshire*



PUMA COUNTY FANTODS

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

AT THE time that Dave Markle was elected sheriff Grandpaw Ike Thomas was sixty-five years old and Dave would have been honestly puzzled if anyone had told him that Grandpaw Ike would shortly

arise on the Markle horizon like a capricious and faintly malignant star. At that time, as far as Dave was concerned, Grandpaw Ike was simply the elderly and (so Dave thought) harmless grandparent of his pretty wife, Margy.

The main trouble, insofar as Grandpaw Ike was concerned, was that Dave personified Law and Order in Puma County, something that Grandpaw Ike had long abhorred. He had been "agin" Law and Order—except for the special brand that he, himself, dealt out on occasion—all of his life and he saw no reason to change now just because his grandson-in-law was sheriff. Not that he didn't like Dave—he did.

"Young feller's just too all-fired serious," he said to Eggmont Saracen, with whom he had fought Indians and rustlers when the two of them had been members of Matt Cooper's company of Texas Rangers. "A thing like this could get out of hand. My Godfrey, Egg, he an' Margy might have kids that'd grow up all serious. Then maybe them kids would have kids that'd grow up the same way. You can see where it might lead to."

"Yup," Eggmont said, spitting at the stove in the back of Saracen's Pool and Billiard Parlor where he and Grandpaw Ike were having a little something to keep off the chill.

"Could get dangerous," Grandpaw Ike said.

He was a bandy-legged little man who had amassed more money than he could ever hope to spend and a lot of Texas real estate which he had named the Star Cross ranch. He had a brown and leathery face lighted by hard blue eyes, the grin of a six-year-old who had just planted a tack in his father's chair and he still dressed as he had when he had ridden with Matt Cooper's rangers—worn jeans tucked into high heeled boots (hand-tooled and fifty dollars a pair) a battered Stetson with a rattlesnake band, and a disreputable shirt with white bone buttons down the front.

"You take this business of Jake Todhunter," he went on. "You an' I know old Amos Todhunter, Jake's paw, an' there wasn't a better man ever shot an Injun. Of course, Jake is bound to be a little high-spirited, bein' old Amos' boy. You got to expect it."

"Yup," Eggmont said, spitting again.

"An' when a high-spirited boy comes to town on a Satidy night he's just bound an' natural goin' to celebrate a little bit."

"Yup. Reckon he is."

"An' not only that," Grandpaw Ike went

on, warming to his subject, "Jake offers to pay this here fat Lem Fisher for the bar mirror that he broke an' all the glasses an' the chairs an' the table. He even offers to pay the doctor for fixin' up Lem's nose an' plasterin' up his bruises an' contusions, so to speak. The fact that Jake ain't got any money to pay said bills ain't got anything to do with it, the way I see it: But what does Dave do?"

"He throws Jake in the can," Eggmont said mournfully. "He's still there."

"That's right!" Grandpaw Ike said in an irascible voice. "I go down to see Dave this mornin'."

"Dave," I says to him, 'you ought to turn Jake Todhunter loose. He's a high-spirited boy an' you're goin' to break his spirit keepin' him in jail like this.'

"Jake Todhunter is fifty year old,' Dave says to me, as if that has got anything to do with it. 'He's nothin' but an' old rowdy an' I ain't goin' to let him go. We got to have Law an' Order in Puma County.'"

Grandpaw Ike took a little more of something to guard against the chill. "Law an' Order!" he snorted. "The idee is enough to give a man the fantods!"

"Terrible things," Eggmont said. "Had 'em myself onct over on the Brazos. Only cure for 'em is whiskey."

"Never touch the stuff myself," Grandpaw Ike said virtuously, helping himself to the cold medicine again. "Only cure for mine is to get Dave Markle straightened out before he brings the carpetbaggers back to Texas again. Hell's galoot, Egg, likely enough he's bustin' Margy's little heart right now!"

"Yup," Eggmont said. "Likely enough."

Grandpaw Ike scowled. "Egg, I don't aim to have Margy's little heart broke by no do-goodin' Yankee—even if I do sort of like the boy."

"What you figure to do about it, Ike?"

Grandpaw Ike scowled. "Ain't made up my mind yet but it's likely to be drastic."

"Yup," Eggmont said. "Figured so. Guess I better oil up the old Sharps."

DAVE MARKLE was sitting in his dingy office when he heard hard boot heels tapping down the corridor. "Somebody in a hurry," he thought absently and went back to sorting the dusty papers on his desk.

Dave was a slight man, dressed in a neat gray suit and with steel-rimmed spectacles hiding his mild eyes. He hailed from New Hampshire and it was a surprise to a lot of folks in Puma County when Dave had been elected sheriff.

That was really nothing to the surprise that went around Puma County, though, when Dave had up and married Margy Thomas. Most of Puma County agreed that Margy was a red-headed hellion who would have been hanged long before now if she had been born a man. Everybody agreed, too, that Margy should have married someone with the build and temperament of John L. Sullivan—someone who would whap her around every now and then with a singletree—and not a quiet little New England snoozer like Dave Markle.

There were those, though, who noted that Dave's chin could take on a stubborn slant and then there was the indisputable fact that he had thrown Jake Todhunter into jail—a thing not previously of record in Puma County.

Now, Dave looked up mildly as the steps stopped outside his office and a boot kicked the door violently open. Grandpaw Ike Thomas was there with a gleam in his eye and an aura of cold medicine about him.

"Come in, Mr. Thomas," Dave said respectfully. "Glad to see you."

"Young feller," Grandpaw Ike said belligerently, "I was fightin' Comanches when you was still wearin' three-cornered pants an' I don't aim to have any back talk from you. I'm tellin' you to turn Jake Todhunter loose. The boy's spirit is right nigh busted already."

Dave picked up a pencil from the top of the desk and began to turn it around in his fingers. "I can't do that," he said quietly.

Grandpaw Ike snorted. "Dang it! You got the keys, ain't you? Know how to unlock a door, don't you? Besides, I hear tell that you been beatin' my granddaughter an' I won't stand for it!"

Dave blinked behind his glasses. "What?" he asked incredulously.

"You heard me, young feller. Now you either let Jake Todhunter out of that confounded jail of yours an' you stop beatin' Margy or you better be gone out of Puma County by morning. Have I made myself clear?"

Dave took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face with it while he stared at Grandpaw Ike Thomas with a faintly fascinated gaze. Then his long jaw tightened stubbornly.

"I'm sheriff of this county, Mr. Thomas," he said. "I'm sworn to uphold the law and as long as I'm sheriff Jake Todhunter stays in jail until the judge says he can go. As for beating Margy—" Dave left the sentence unfinished and shook his head. "Maybe you'd better go home and lie down for a little while. You'll feel better."

A sudden and outraged expression crossed Grandpaw Ike's face. "By Godfrey!" he said. "I see it all now! You're a damned carpetbagger, Markle. Come down here from New Hampshire to reconstruct Texas again, did yuh? Well, when I come back, young feller, I'll come back a-shootin'."

He stamped out into the corridor, trailing the heady aroma of his special medicine. Dave shook his head and grinned a little wryly. "And, by golly, the old coot means it," he murmured. "Well, we'll see what comes up."

What he didn't know was that Grandpaw Ike was suffering from a violent attack of the fantods—a malady occasionally suffered by the Thomas family and usually brought on by early spring weather and copious doses of cold medicine. During such spells the Thomases were apt to revert to the grievances of the War Between the States.

IT WAS after six that afternoon when Dave got home. He kissed Margy and noted a little absently that there was a faint lack of warmth in her greeting. However, his mind was filled with other matters and he didn't mention that as he settled himself in his favorite rocking chair. Margy sat down opposite and smoothed her skirt across her knees. She was a robust girl with a chin of her own and a lot of her grandfather's, "Here-we-go-boys-and-to-hell-with-the-Dragoons," in her.

"Dave," she said, "I want you to let Jake Todhunter out of jail. Right away. Tonight."

Dave shook his head mildly. "You know I can't do that."

"You mean you won't. Why not, Dave Markle?"

"Only the judge can let Jake out," Dave

said patiently. "And, even if I could, I wouldn't."

"Nuts!" Margy said impatiently. "You're just being stubborn. Grandpaw Ike was here a little while ago and said that you were full of some such nonsense or other. I never heard of anything so silly. I told him that I'd have you go down and let Jake out just as soon as you came home."

Dave sighed heavily and there was a dogged look in his eyes. "Well, you can go down tomorrow and tell him that I wouldn't do it," he said heavily.

Margy's foot tapped a little against the floor and her mouth settled into a chilly expression. "Dave Markle," she said, "you know good and well that Jake Todhunter didn't do a thing except to muss up a bartender a little. Everybody in Texas knows that it isn't any crime to muss up a bartender a little. Even bartenders know it."

"Well, I don't know it," Dave said shortly.

Margy's eyes widened a little—Dave had never spoken to her in a tone like that before. Neither had anyone else and got away with it. There was an angry spark in her glance as she got up and went over to stand in front of Dave.

"Of course not," she said nastily. "An' that's because you're not a Texan, Dave Markle. You're nothin' at all except a miserable Yankee. Anybody could see that with one eye!"

Dave squirmed a little—this was the first quarrel that he had ever had with Margy—but he realized that he had to stand his ground now if he was ever going to stand his ground at all. "Okay," he said doggedly. "I'm a Yankee, maybe, but I'm sheriff, too, and I don't take orders from you or that old goat that was—"

Sparks really flew from Margy's eyes now. "So my gran'father is an old goat, is he?" she stormed. "So that's what you think of my family, is it? The Thomases aren't good enough for you, I suppose! Well, David Ulysses Simpson Grant Markle—"

"Hey!" Dave said with a faint trace of alarm in his voice, "Don't get so upset. I didn't mean—"

"I suppose you'll beat me next!" Margy said, her voice lifting shrilly. "Grandpaw Ike said you would. Well, you just try it!"

"Hey!" Dave said again, really alarmed

now. If he had been a little wiser in the ways of women he might have guessed that what Margy craved from her husband now was a few good, old-fashioned tactics—such as a poke in the eye. "I tell you that I didn't mean—"

"Why don't you burn the house down and pour kerosene in that flour and chop up the piano while you're about it, you—you Tecumseh Sherman, you! Think that you're making another march to the sea through Texas, I suppose! Well, the Thomas clan will show you that you're not!"

She spun around and reached for a vase which was standing on a little table and it smashed against the wall just above Dave's head. She was reaching for a bigger vase as Dave got out of the door. He heard it explode like a bomb behind him.

It was almost dark as he climbed the wooden steps of the courthouse and went down the dim corridor to his office. There was a sliver of light beneath his closed door—he pushed the door open and went on in—then paused with his mouth a little open. Miss Lindy Carteret, Grandpaw Ike's distant cousin and housekeeper at Star Cross ranch, was sitting at his desk with her feet propped on a half-opened drawer.

"Come in an' set, Sheriff," Miss Lindy said in her sweet, old maid's voice. "I declare to goodness I been waitin' for you."

"Waiting?" Dave asked blankly.

"Sho' nuff. Waitin'. You see, I just came by yo' house a little bit ago—ten minutes, maybe—an' it 'peared to like yo an' Margy was havin' words, so to speak. So I figured you'd be comin' down here pretty quick, knowin' what havin' words with a Thomas can lead to."

"Uh," Dave said. "I see."

MISS LINDY was a frail woman with a white helmet of hair about her face and a dimple in one cheek and the soul of a Genghis Khan beneath her placid exterior. Once, with a Negro cowhand named Jereboam, she had stood off fifty Kiowas at Star Cross until Matt Cooper and his Rangers had arrived from San Angelo. The story around Puma County was that the Kiowas were mighty glad to see Captain Matt and his men arrive. Mighty glad.

Dave liked Miss Lindy but this was the first time that she had ever visited his

office and he had a sinking feeling that he knew what she had come for. She, too, was going to demand that he turn Jake Todhunter loose. That feeling wasn't lessened by the sound of a long drawn howl which drifted down the corridor from the jail which was at the back of the courthouse. That was Jake Todhunter mourning his incarceration—Dave didn't know that Grandpaw Ike Thomas earlier had slipped Jake a little something to drive away the chill of the evening.

Miss Lindy cocked her head and listened while she took a sack of tobacco and papers from her handbag. "Noisy ol' galoot, ain't he, Sheriff?" she asked. "Why don't you take a wagon spoke an' quiet him down a little. All the Todhunters have been noisy."

Dave felt a sudden warmth begin to spread through him as he realized that Miss Lindy was friend and not enemy.

He pitched his hat onto the desk and pulled up a chair. "Miss Lindy," he said, "I'm sure glad to see you. I've got troubles."

"Figured so," Miss Lindy said placidly.

"Never seen the Thomases when they're havin' the fantods before, I reckon."

"Fantods?" Dave asked in a voice which was a little dazed.

"Guess you don't have 'em up in New Hampshire," Miss Lindy said, scratching a match on the sole of her boot. "They're an aggravation that comes on in the spring. Figured Grandpaw Ike had 'em this mornin' when he got up an' took a potshot at George A. Custer."

"George A. Custer?" Dave asked, shaken.

"Yep," Miss Lindy said. "George A. was sittin' on top of the saddle shed washin' himself when Grandpaw Ike busted a shingle right under him with his old .45-70. You never saw such a surprised tomcat in your life, Sheriff."

"I didn't?" Dave said weakly.

"No, suh. You sure didn't. Last I saw of George A. he was headin' for the Border with his tail stuck right straight out behind him. He'll come back, though. He's seen Grandpaw Ike in the fantods before an' it ain't the first time that he's had a shingle busted underneath him. What you goin' to do about Grandpaw Ike, Sheriff?"

"I wish I knew," Dave said morosely.

"I take it that he's been ridin' you with

spurs to let that no-account Jake Todhunter out of jail?"

"He has. And he's not the only one, either."

"Humph!" Miss Lindy said. "Margy, too, eh? Might have guessed it. Well, that's what I came down here about."

Dave reached out and clutched at the straw with the desperation of a man going down for the third time. "You mean you're going to help, Miss Lindy?"

"Yep," Miss Lindy told him, grinning around her cigarette. "I been puttin' up with Ike Thomas' spring fantods for forty year an' I figure it's time to put a stop to 'em. Didn't have much hope of doin' it, though, until you came along."

"Miss Lindy," Dave said in an earnest voice, "I'm your man—but what the devil can we do?"

"Plenty," Miss Lindy answered succinctly. "You just come along an' do as I say, Sheriff."

IT WAS about eight that evening when Grandpaw Ike Thomas dismounted in front of the Saracen Pool and Billiard Parlor. Inside, he passed the time of day with a half dozen loafers and then went on toward the back room, motioning Eggmont Saracen to follow. The latter came, closing the door.

"Been beatin' her, just like I figured," Grandpaw Ike said with satisfaction. "I come by there on my way an' I could hear her bawlin' clear out to the street. Plain enough that we got to take steps."

"Yup," Eggmont said. "What you got in mind?"

"First off we go down an' bust Jake Todhunter out of jail," Grandpaw Ike told him. "Then the three of us catch Dave an' throw him in the horse trough just to show him that he can't go around beatin' wives, even if they are his own."

"Yup," Eggmont said. "Mighty chilly out at this time of year. Maybe we ought to have something to keep from catchin' cold before we go."

"Mighty chilly," Grandpaw Ike agreed. It was three-quarters of an hour later when the two left the pool hall a trifle unsteadily. Grandpaw Ike climbed onto his horse, needing two tries to make it. "Whoopiee!" he yelled shrilly. "Come on, Eggmont! You

an' I are goin' to clean the carpetbaggers out of Puma County! Whoopie!"

Across the street, in the lobby of the Sentinel Hotel, Miss Lindy nudged Dave with her elbow. "See?" she asked with satisfaction. "Headed toward the jail just like I figured they would, the old fools. You ain't forgot what I told you, have you, Sheriff?"

Dave grinned a little tightly. "I haven't forgotten, Miss Lindy. The only one that I'm worried about is Margy."

"You leave Margy to me," Miss Lindy said decisively. "They're past the corner now. Figure it's time you an' I went into action."

DAVE MARKLE'S house stood at the corner of Cash and Stopford streets and, as he and Eggmont came abreast of the place, Grandpaw Ike reined his horse in. There were lights in the windows.

"Better stop in an' see Margy for a minute," Grandpaw Ike said solemnly. "Might be that Dave's beatin' her again."

"Yup," Eggmont said. "Might be."

Grandpaw Ike dismounted to lead the way up the boardwalk and hammer loudly on the front door. It opened presently and Margy stood there in a wrapper, her eyes a little red as she regarded her two visitors with a suspicious stare. Eggmont shuffled his feet nervously.

"Well?" Margy demanded coldly.

"Dave been beatin' you again, honey?" Grandpaw Ike asked in a solicitous voice.

Margy blinked her eyes and then narrowed them ominously. "What the devil are you talkin' about, Grandpaw Ike?" she demanded. She sniffed a little then and caught a certain aroma. "Humph! You can start tellin' me what this is all about. Right now!"

"Dave," Grandpaw Ike said in a dignified voice. "Can't have him beatin' my granddaughter this-away. Goin' to save you from him. Goin' to save Jake Todhunter, too."

"Jake Todhunter," Margy said frostily, "can lay in jail until he rots. Where's Dave? I want him."

"Hidin'," Grandpaw Ike said shrilly. "Hidin', just like a damned carpetbagger. Don't you worry, honey. We're goin' to see that he don't beat you no more."

"Dave Markle never laid a hand on

me in his life and you know it," Margy said in a dangerous voice. "Now, you two old rumpots get off my porch before I——" The slam of the door punctuated the unfinished sentence. It was three minutes later when Miss Lindy came in the back way to find Margy face down on the couch.

Margy lifted a face that was a little streaked. "Oh, Miss Lindy," she wailed, "Grandpaw Ike and that awful old Eggmont Saracen are on the prod an' lookin' for Dave an' I don't know where he is an' what in hell am I goin' to do?"

Miss Lindy sat on the table and made herself a cigarette and swung her legs. "Hear you threw him out, Margy. Flang things at him, sort of."

"I did," Margy said. "If he'd been half a man he'd smacked me in the eye. But he didn't. He just left."

"Been beatin' you, I hear," Miss Lindy said, looking at Margy out of the corners of her eyes while she squinted a little through the cigarette smoke.

"Miss Lindy," Margy wailed again, "how can you even think such a thing? Of course, Dave hasn't been beatin' me—I wish he had. I was dreadful, dirt mean to him and he don't know how onery people can be out here in Texas and Grandpaw Ike and Eggmont Saracen are goin' to bust that no-good Jake Todhunter out of jail an' then run Dave out of town an' it's all my fault!"

"Humph!" Miss Lindy said, dropping the remains of her cigarette onto the rug. "What makes you so sure that they'll run Dave out of town, honey?"

"Because Dave's so quiet an' easy goin', Miss Lindy. He thinks everybody is just as swell as he is. What chance has he got against those two old catamounts?"

"Maybe you don't know this Dave of yours as well as you think you do," Miss Lindy said in a soft voice. "Accordin' to what my pappy told me there were some awful tough Yankees that fit at Gettysburg. He used to tell me about a couple of 'em that—but this ain't the time for yarin', honey. Maybe you'd like to see 'Dave when he really gets his dander up."

Margy sat up suddenly and pushed the hair back out of her face. "Miss Lindy, you think—?"

"Shucks, honey," Miss Lindy said. "An old woman like me can't think. Suppose

you get your shawl an' we take a little stroll down by the jail. If there should happen to be some fireworks we wouldn't want to miss 'em, would we?"

"Would we?" Margy said with a new lift to her voice. "We would not. Miss Lindy, if—."

"Shucks, honey," Miss Lindy told her, "the trouble with you is that you really don't know just what sort of a rip-snortin' husband you've got yourself."

DAVE MARKLE was, at about that time, unlocking the door of Jake Todhunter's cell. By the light of the lamp, which rested in a bracket just outside, he could see Jake stretched out on his narrow cot—a lanky man with wispy hair and a sallow face who slept peacefully as a result of the medicine which Grandpaw Ike Thomas had left with him earlier.

Dave grinned a little as he went across and shook Jake by the shoulder.

"Jake!" he said in a low voice. "Wake up, man!"

"Unnnh," Jake mumbled and rolled on his side.

For a couple of seconds Dave paused. Then he stepped away and picked up the water bucket; emptied it across the sleeping Jake. The latter sat up, choking and with his eyes staring wildly.

"God-amighty!" he gasped. "The dam has bust. Ride for your lives, boys!"

Dave had him by the shoulder. "Shhhh," he said. The zaniness of this business was beginning to break through his New England reserve and he struggled to keep from chuckling. Quite a gal, Miss Lindy. She had nice ideas. "Can you hear me, Jake?"

Jake Todhunter propped his eyes open with his fingers and peered owlishly at Dave in the dim light. "Yeah. Yeah," he said. "It's the sheriff, ain't it?"

"That's right," Dave whispered. "Look, Jake, I'm afraid that you're in trouble. I hear tell that there's a bunch on their way down here to get you. You can guess why, can't you?"

"God-amighty!" Jake said again. "That damn Lem Fisher must have died. They'll string me up for sure, Sheriff. You got to do something!"

"I'll hold them off as long as I can," Dave said in a dubious voice. "I tell you

what I'll do. I'll give you a gun so if they get by me you'll at least have a chance."

"Oh, my golly," Jake groaned. "If I ever get out of this one, I'm goin' to be a reformed *hombre* from now on!"

Dave went back to his office; returned a minute later with a .45. He didn't bother to tell Jake that it was loaded with blank cartridges and he figured that Jake, still being considerably under the influence of Grandpaw Ike's medicine, wouldn't bother to look. He didn't.

"Sheriff," he said gratefully, "you're all right. I'm goin' to vote for you come next election—if I'm around next election."

Dave nodded soberly and went on out, pausing for a moment to put out the light. He made a pretense of locking the cell door but left it unlocked; then went on down the corridor.

There was a broom closet at the far end and he stepped into this and waited. He didn't have to wait long.

GRANDPAW Ike Thomas reined his horse up in front of the courthouse and thumped to the ground unsteadily. There was a light in the window of the sheriff's office and he stared at it frowning then began to climb the wooden steps. "Ain't had so much fun since we run the coroner out of Gaileyville," he whooped.

"Yup," Eggmont said. "Light in the sheriff's office. What you figure to do if he's there?"

"He's nothin' but a measly little old New Hampshire snoozer." Grandpaw Ike said. "I an' you will just naturally take the jail keys away from him an' let Jake loose."

"Yup," Eggmont said a little dubiously. "Suppose he don't want to let go of them keys, Ike?"

"Shucks, you don't need to worry about nothin' like that," Grandpaw Ike said. He led the way down the corridor and pushed open the door of the sheriff's office. A lamp burned in a bracket against the wall but the room was empty. "Probably home hidin' under the bed," Grandpaw Ike said contemptuously. "Look around for the keys, Egg."

They ransacked drawers to no avail and, after five minutes, Grandpaw Ike finally decided that the keys weren't there. He and Eggmont paused for a moment to renew

their immunity against the night chill and take counsel with themselves.

"Maybe Jake knows where he keeps 'em," Grandpaw Ike said. "I an' you'll go ask him."

"Yup."

The corridor leading to Jake's cell was dark but the two of them felt their way along, making a racket like a herd of cattle going through a brushy creek bottom. Then Grandpaw Ike's groping fingers found a steel knob, turned it and the door swung open. He hesitated for a moment; then grunted disgustedly.

"Hell's galoots, Egg," he mumbled. "Dave ain't only home hidin' under the bed but he leaves the door unlocked so that we—"

HE didn't get to finish. A hand suddenly caught the slack of his trousers and propelled him violently on into the cell. He sprawled forward on his hands and knees and Eggmont fell across him as the cell door slammed behind them and the key turned in the lock.

"Hey!" Grandpaw Ike yelled shrilly.

A voice came suddenly from the cot in the corner where Jake Todhunter, still happy from the cold medicine, had been dozing again, oblivious to what was going on around him. He awakened with a bang.

A gun spanged wickedly in the darkness and Grandpaw Ike's voice rose in an anguished howl. "God-amighty! Jake's got a gun an' he's gone plumb crazy. Run for your life, Egg!"

"Where to?" Eggmont yelled back.

More shots split the night and then Dave, standing just down the corridor, heard the sound of blows and the confused scrape of feet and thresh of bodies. "I'll tromple yuh like I'd tromple a rattlesnake!" Jake Todhunter was yelling. Dave grinned tightly. It was about time to go into action, he decided.

He let out a yell that dwarfed the racket which was going on in the cell and began to shoot with both hands. His bullets whacked into the ceiling with convincing reality and a shocked silence followed.

"Whoopee!" he shouted. "I'm a ring-tailed catamount from Contoocook River! I'm forked lightning and sudden death all

rolled into one! Throw out your guns before I come in and get 'em!"

For a moment there was a shocked silence. Then Grandpaw Ike's voice, sounding a little awed, said, "God-amighty! It's Dave an' I'm damned if he ain't on the prod! Better do like he says, boys. There's no tellin' what one of these fellers from New Hampshire is liable to do."

Dave was lighting the lamp in the corridor when he heard the tap of running heels and turned. It was Margy and she stopped suddenly as she saw her husband—a different Dave than she had ever seen before. His glasses were off and his hair was rumpled and he still held a gun in his left hand. Powder smoke was thick in the corridor and, at the far end, three men on their hands and knees peered cautiously through the bars of the cell door.

"Dave!" Margy wailed. "Are you all right?"

Dave glared at her. "I'm a Yankee from New Hampshire," he said. "Got it?"

"You can be anything you want to," Margy said, flinging herself at him. "I think you're wonderful!"

GRANDPAW Ike Thomas came into Eggmont Saracen's Pool and Billiard Parlor late the next afternoon. One eye was brilliant purple and a strip of tape ran across his chin. He nodded at Eggmont who was similarly decorated. A fat man was holding forth to a half dozen loafers.

"It's a sin and a shame that Dave Markle should keep Jake Todhunter locked up," he was saying. "We ought to do something about it."

"Such as?" Grandpaw Ike asked.

The fat man slapped his hand down on the bar. "Some of us ought to go over there and let him loose. That's what!"

"First man that tries it will find himself pickin' lead out of his pants," Grandpaw Ike snarled. "Dave Markle has set up Law an' Order in Puma County an' I aim to see that it stays set up. Ain't that right, Egg?"

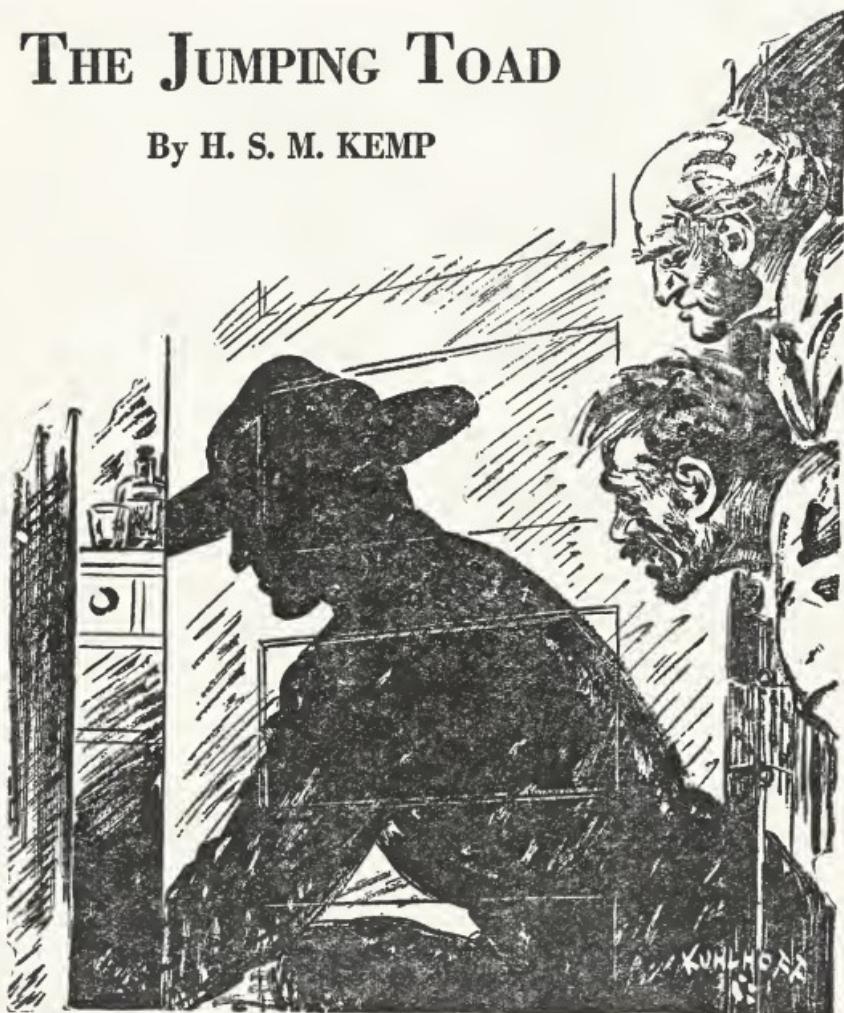
"Yup," Eggmont said, fingering the patch on his cheek.

"Maybe we all ought to have something to ward off the chill," Grandpaw Ike said in a more tractable voice. "It's on me, boys."

His fantods were gone.

THE JUMPING TOAD

By H. S. M. KEMP



THE BIG DC transport cut a corner of Oxide Lake, clipped the tips of the spruce trees and settled on the mile-long runway that had been bulldozed out of solid bush. Twenty or so passengers disembarked from the plane, and Mounted Police Corporal Ted Haddon, on hand at the time, looked them over with mild interest.

Mostly they were hardrock men, back from a spree in civilization, six hundred miles to the south. Several were local townspeople. And the remainder were a couple of nurses for the Consolidated's hospital, an Indian squaw, and a man in prospector's attire.

Ted Haddon took in the man's whipcords, his slouch hat, his high boots. To old Jeff



*" . . . It's the Guys with
Alibis That We'll Have
to Watch!"*

Nichols, standing beside him, he said, "Still they come. This guy's a new one on me."

Old Jeff squinted. "You mean the tall guy? I know him; knew him years ago down at Noranda. Name of Keller, Charlie Keller. Runs an assay business in Winnipeg and calls himself a geologist." Old Jeff spat. "Calls himself—yeah!"

The corporal gave the stranger a keener glance. "Well, what's wrong about it?"

"Ask Red Millman," suggested old Jeff. "This Keller was the guy who assayed the stuff Red sent out last Fall. Samples he found up at Kasbin Lake." Old Jeff chuckled mirthlessly. "Keller wrote back to say they was all low-grade ore. Worth mebbe five dollars the ton. Then when Doggy Rogers staked the prop'ty this Spring, she turns out to grade around two hundred the ton. Geologist!" sniffed old Jeff. "He don't know quicksand from quartz!"

The corporal was not particularly interested in the appearance of Charlie Keller in Oxide Lake, but when he got back to the Police detachment, he mentioned the man's

arrival to one of his two constables, Porky Johnson.

"Old Jeff claims to have known him down at Noranda. Says he calls himself a geologist. But according to old Jeff, he don't know quicksand from quartz."

Porky, polishing a jack-boot, gave a grunt. "That old buzzard's always squawking about something. And what does he know about it? Man can't just call himself a geologist. He's got to pass exams—"

Haddon nodded. "Sure. But Jeff says this Keller did some assay work for Red Millman last Fall and pulled a boner. Told Red the samples he sent out were no good. Then when Doggy Rogers staked the same stuff, it turns out to be rich."

Porky said, "I know all about that. It happened just before you landed here. Doggy was working for Big Bill Stedman. Leastways, Big Bill grubstaked him. And after the claims were registered and turned out to be good, Big Bill offered him the choice of a partnership or cash for an outright sale. Doggy took the dough; and that's how

he came to start up this poolroom he's running in town."

"So what?" argued the corporal. "Don't that back up what old Jeff was saying—about the quicksand and the quartz?"

"Nuts!" scoffed Porky. "This Red Mill-man, he's a dimwit anyway. He blundered onto the stuff and told everyone about it; but when it came to samples, he probably picked up a chunk of pyrites or some oxidized rock and sent 'em in. He's no prospector, anyhow; just a fair-to-middlin' trapper. Doggy Rogers, though, is a prospector. Doggy sent in proper samples, and he got a proper report. So you can't hold that against this guy Keller. Man can only report on what he sees."

OXIDE LAKE, nearer the Barrens than civilization, was a town that had mushroomed to fame by the magic of new-found gold. Old Jeff Nichols had made the original strike, and when news of it got around, a flood of other prospectors poured in. In the two years since its birth, Oxide Lake gave promise of overshadowing Snow Lake, Red Lake or even Yellowknife. Three mines were already in operation, with half a dozen others in process of development.

The town itself was out of the shantytent stage. It boasted lumber buildings, a movie house, a weekly newspaper and a population of three thousand souls. Most of the residents—and most of the materials that had gone into the buildings of the town—had been flown in by air. By two-bit biplanes, by roomier freight-planes, by big multi-engined Dougs. Slower freight came by river-boat, with more landed by cat-train in the winter.

Constable Porky Johnson was one of the first to arrive. For a year and more he was the sole representative of law-and-order in the northern community; but the Cain-raising hardrock men came too fast for him and he had to call for help. Help was furnished by another constable and Corporal Ted Haddon.

A lesser—or greater—man than Porky Johnson might have resented the coming of Haddon. Resented his authority. But Porky was chunky, good-natured, with the philosophy that work was preferable to grief. So he went his easy-going way and left the worries of the detachment to the n.c.o.

For his part, Ted Haddon had put in all his twelve years of police service in the North. In the Far North. And after winters of long patrols and summers of isolation, Oxide Lake seemed like a home from home. Now he liked to drift from store to hotel, from hotel to bunkhouse and rub shoulders with his own kind again.

Thus it was that that evening he bumped into the geologist, Charlie Keller. He met him in the lobby of the Hotel Northern, where Keller was staying, in company of Gus Ryker, manager of the Polaris interests.

Polaris, Haddon knew, was a British-American company developing a mine a short distance out of town. It had money, and it spent it; and it was quite willing to expand.

Introduced to the geologist by Gus Ryker, Haddon found Keller to be a blotchy-faced individual of fifty who probably liked a drink. Ryker, fat and affable, hinted at the nature of Keller's visit to Oxide Lake.

"Costs money to haul top-flight geologists from Winnipeg," he boasted. "But when Polaris wants anything bad enough, well, we don't balk at expense."

He didn't elaborate on what Polaris wanted, nor did Haddon bother to enquire; but the information was forthcoming later in the evening when the corporal drifted into Doggy Rogers' poolroom.

Doggy, the man who had profited most by Keller's ill-founded report on Red Mill-man's Kasbin Lake samples, was kidding Slim May at the tobacco-counter when Ted Haddon walked in. Doggy was saying:

"Well, Slim, it won't be long now before you know the worst. I mean, about your claims."

Slim, horse-faced and morose, retorted, "Ain't no worst about it. Either way I win."

Doggy said, "What d'ya mean, either way?"

Slim shrugged. "Polaris turns me down, well, Hob Norris takes me over. And for more money than Gus Ryker and his gang want to pay."

Then, as though deciding the corporal wished to make a purchase, Slim pushed over to a bench against the wall and watched a snooker-game that was going on.

But the corporal wanted to make no purchase. He did want to know, though, what Slim May and Doggy were talking about.

With a jerk of his head toward Slim he said, "Another millionaire in the making?"

Doggy Rogers folded his fat arms on the counter and gave a grin.

"Yeah, the way Slim tells it he owns them claims up on Rocky Lake and he gave Gus Ryker an option on 'em. It's gettin' close to deadline, so Gus hires this Keller guy to come in and give 'em the once-over." Doggy chuckled. "I was tellin' Slim it won't be long now before he knows the worst; but like you heard, he says he wins either way."

The corporal grunted noncommittally. "How long has the option got to run?"

"Less'n a week," Doggy answered. "This is the tenth, and Slim says she's up on the fifteenth."

Again the corporal grunted. "But this guy Keller—? Funny Gus Ryker'd hire him. You'd think his name'd be mud around here, after the bum steer he gave Red Millman."

Doggy frowned, said he didn't know. "I was the guy that staked it afterwards, this stuff of Red's," he pointed out. "She looked good to me right away. But I ain't blamin' Keller for goin' wrong. You see, I figure that Red picked his samples up right alongside the shore. There was a pretty fair outcrop there—chunks of galena, a few streaks of nickel and this pyrite stuff. Red probly grabbed what he saw and sent it in. But I'm a prospector, me; leastways, I was; and I figured that showin's like that oughta lead to somep'n good. So I follerred her back into the bush, and I come onto the real stuff a quarter-mile away. No," Doggy said stubbornly, "I ain't blamin' Keller at all."

They talked on concerning the claim and switched to those other claims, those of Slim May up on Rocky Lake; and while they were still discussing them, Hob Norris came in.

THIS CORPORAL knew Norris merely by sight, but he knew him to be pretty much a plunger. The man controlled his own company and seemed to have considerable funds. On appearance—tall, clean-shaven and wearing rimless glasses—he looked more the professional man than one mixed up in the hardrock game; but there was a set to his lips and a look in his eye that hinted at Hob Norris being a tough man to get around.

Entering, he nodded to Doggy Rogers, but apparently Doggy was not his concern. For after a quick look around the smoke-layered poolroom, he headed straight for the bench on which Slim May was sitting.

The corporal watched him, saw him pull a couple of cigars from his pocket and offer one to Slim May; noticed how little time he lost in getting into direct conversation with the man. Then the corporal turned back to Doggy Rogers.

"Another guy," he remarked, "who seems to know what he wants. But there's not much he can do with Slim if Gus Ryker holds Slim's option."

"Nope," agreed Doggy. "Even if he wants to pay a bigger price." The poolroom keeper shook his head. "Don't always pay to be in too much a hurry. Me, now, I had to sell my stuff to Big Bill Stedman, him grubstakin' me; but Slim shouldn't of jumped at the first offer that come along. If Gus holds him to his option, seems like it'll cost Slim money. And Gus'll sure hold him, all right. He ain't flyin' this Keller guy in here just for fun."

The corporal went back to his detachment and to bed; and the next day he heard that the geologist, Keller, was already at work. The matter was of no great consequence to him, so in the routine of his duties he forgot him entirely. But only until about ten o'clock of the second day, when the desk-clerk from the Hotel Northern crashed into the detachment with the news that Keller was dead.

"His door was locked," panted the clerk. "And when we bust it in he was stretched out cold!"

The corporal quit the report on which he was working, grabbed his Stetson and hurried out.

It was a short block to the hotel, along a bouldery street that fronted the lake. Haddon found two or three men in the lobby as well as the sombre-faced proprietor. At the corporal's, "Well?", the proprietor led the way upstairs and to a room halfway down the corridor on the first floor. A wide-eyed bellboy stood guard outside, and Haddon brushed by him and walked in.

The geologist, Keller, was sprawled across the bed. The bed hadn't been slept in, and save for coat and sweater, the man was fully dressed. His eyes were half-closed, his

mouth half-open, and his blotchy features were putty-grey. There was no need for it, but Haddon crossed the floor and felt for the pulse. Then he turned to the proprietor in the doorway.

"You find him?"

The proprietor, a clean-shaven, bald-headed man in his late fifties, said, "Yeah. But I had to bust in the door to do it." At Haddon's raise of eyebrows, he explained, "Gus Ryker phoned up from the mine to ask where he'd got to. Said he was due to meet him there at eight as they were flying over to Rocky Lake again. I said I figured the guy had slept in, so I come up to call him. The door was locked, and when he didn't answer me, I got kinda scared. So I bust in—and there he was."

The desk-clerk appeared. Haddon said to him, "Find Doc Kelly and tell him to get here quick. Tell him I said so."

As the clerk hurried off, Haddon took another glance around the room.

It was one of the better ones in the house, airy, containing the bed, two armchairs, a washstand and a bureau. The other incidentals were a valise on the floor, a business-suit on a hanger, a comb and brush and a whiskey-flask on the bureau-top. There was no disorder to the place, nothing unusual about it. But after eyeing the flask, Haddon asked the proprietor, "This guy have any visitors last night?"

THIS hotelman didn't know. "I was in and out a lot; but the night-clerk can tell you more about that than me."

Haddon said, "Get him."

It didn't take long. The night-clerk had turned his duties over to his relief at eight, had eaten breakfast and had just taken a bath before turning in. He showed up with the proprietor, in pajamas and dressing-gown, and seemed badly jarred at what he saw.

Haddon waited a moment, then asked, "Did you see this chap last night?"

The night-clerk tore his glance from the unlovely figure on the bed, blinked, and seemed to be giving the question thought.

"Saw him some," he finally admitted. "He was in the dining-room for supper and went to a show afterwards. He come in again and headed upstairs. Maybe around ten o'clock."

"Was he alone? Nobody called on him afterwards?"

"No."

"Too bad," grunted Keller. "But maybe you can tell. Was he different in any way?"

"Not that I noticed. But then I didn't bother with him much."

Haddon was giving another look around when hurrying footsteps brought Doc Kelly upstairs. The medico nodded, said, "Trouble, Ted?" And Haddon beckoned him into the room.

KELLY was a young man, dark, chunky, but alert. He stooped over the figure of the dead man, prodded him, flexed an arm. He looked around, caught sight of the whiskey-flask and gave a grunt. "The old ticker again. Couldn't take it any more."

Haddon asked him, "How long's the guy been dead? I mean, within three or four hours."

"Three or four hours?" Kelly seemed puzzled. "You don't want it closer than that?"

"Not for a start."

"Well," decided Kelly, "it'll be a good deal longer than three hours. Offhand, I'd say ten or eleven. Say somewhere around midnight last night."

"Midnight, eh?" mused the corporal. He turned to the night-clerk. "If he'd had visitors around midnight, you'd have known it?"

"Probably would," agreed the clerk. "Though in a town like this, midnight's pretty much like midday. Beer-parlors still open and the boys on the move."

"But if any strangers, anyone who wasn't a guest, had headed upstairs, you'd have seen him?"

"Strangers," pointed out the clerk, "aren't allowed upstairs. That is, without permission."

Doc Kelly was still studying the corpse on the bed. The corporal asked him, "Still figure it was a heart-attack, Doc?"

The medico shrugged. "Could be. Probably was." He eyed the flask again.

Haddon grinned. "Not on account of that, Doc. It'd take more than another slug of whiskey to cool this bird off."

Kelly nodded thoughtfully. He asked, "You want an autopsy?"

"I want to know why he died."

THEY removed the body to Sam Roberts' makeshift undertaking rooms. Left alone the corporal went to work. With care, he wrapped the whiskey-flask in a towel from the washstand, poked into the ashtray and fished out half a dozen cigarette butts. After that he went through the suitcase.

The contents were mostly clothing—socks and underwear and shirts. As well, there was a technical handbook and a dozen packets of cigarettes. Haddon noticed that the cigarettes were Pall Mall, the same brand as the butts in the ashtray. He was repacking the stuff when Porky Johnson strolled in.

The constable's face held a quizzical expression.

"I bin hearing things," he observed. "The death of a distinguished visitor. The Chamber of Commerce won't like that."

"I don't like it either," growled Haddon. "And I like it the less I think about it." He snapped the lock on the suitcase and stood up. "Listen," he said. "I'll tell you what I know."

When he had finished, he said, "So there you are. The guy conks out about midnight last night, and we find him stretched out, fully dressed, across the bed. Now nothing's been touched, nothing in here has been disturbed at all. That is, except for the crock I wrapped up there in the towel. Okay, then; look around and tell me what's wrong with the picture."

Porky looked around as ordered. "Midnight, eh?" he mused, and looked around again.

Haddon could almost hear Porky's mental processes at work. The constable scowled at the walls and the bed, the window and the light-globe. Finally, he asked, "That blamed light—was it out when you got here? And the door locked?"

Haddon's smile was one of approbation. "You've hit her, Porky. And that's what I found funny. That, and the window-shade being up. The way I heard it, this coot came upstairs around ten last night to go to bed. Fall now, like it is, it'd be dark at ten. So did he come up here in the dark, locate his crock in the dark, take a little snort and pass out? Or did he turn on the light, have his snort, lock the door, turn out the light again and then collapse crosswise of the bed like I saw him?"

Porky said he wouldn't know. Haddon admitted he wouldn't know either.

"If the light had been out and he'd been in bed, it would have made sense. Or if the light had been still on when we found him, it wouldn't have been too bad. But the way it is, well, looks like I've got to ask some questions."

At that moment another man came up to the room. Constable Jimmie Grey said he'd heard something and what was it all about.

"Don't know yet," the corporal told him. "But I'm glad you're here. What I want you to do is to look after things till I get back. Don't let anyone inside the room and don't touch anything yourself." He added, "Porky and I are going down to the office. I want to find out just who is who in this joint."

They found three men together at the hotel desk. One was the proprietor, another was Freddie Nixon, a bush-pilot, and the third was Big Bill Stedman. The latter two were regular roomers in the hotel.

Both had heard of the death of Keller. Freddie Nixon said it was too bad, while Big Bill Stedman opined that good might yet come of it.

"The guy was probably all right in his way, but for the job he was doing he wasn't so hot. Maybe Gus Ryker'll win out on the deal."

Haddon couldn't get the idea for a moment till he realized that Big Bill Stedman had been Doggy Rogers' patron in his search for gold and had later bought out the claims that Doggy located. The claims on which the geologist had earlier given Red Millman the sour report.

"Maybe you've got something there," Haddon conceded. "But even if the guy put his foot in it once, I'd still like to know how he came to die. And perhaps you fellows can help me."

Big Bill bit the end from a cigar, said he was the original Boy Scout when it came to helping, but he couldn't see just what help he could be.

"You didn't drop in on him last night?" suggested Haddon. "Or you, Freddie?"

Both said they had never even met him. "Though," added Big Bill, "I wish I had now. Might have got the straight on them samples that Red Millman sent him."

"I mean," said Ted Haddon, patiently,

"I'd like to run into someone who saw him late last night. Maybe the guy was sick; maybe he'd had these attacks before."

The hotel was a plain, two-story building containing about twenty rooms. Freddie Nixon, whose room was two doors west of Keller's, thought he'd heard someone knock on Keller's door last night. Though, he admitted, he could have been mistaken. He was preparing for bed.

"It was Keller's," put in Big Bill. "My room's one west of Freddie's but I heard the knock, too. Just before I went down to the Aurora for coffee and pie."

"What time would that be?" Haddon asked.

"Maybe ten-thirty, quarter to eleven. And whoever called on the guy was still in there when I come back. The light was on and I could hear 'em talking. And that'd be between eleven-thirty and twelve."

"You heard 'em talking?" echoed Haddon. "You mean, plainly? You didn't recognize the other guy's voice?"

Big Bill said, "No. But then I wasn't interested. It was late, and I was more interested in gettin' to bed."

SO KELLER had had a visitor. That was something, even though it might be quite a chore to turn him up. But when Freddie Nixon and Big Bill had gone, the corporal asked the proprietor if he had a register of the guests of the hotel. He was given one, and from it Haddon made a list of all the occupants of the rooms.

Six of the rooms were used by the hotel staff, two—flanking Keller's—were empty, and the balance were rented to local townspeople. Thus the dentist had a room, Bill Ames from the movie-house and his wife had a suite of three more, with the rest spread amongst the local mining-fraternity, Freddie Nixon, and a brother bush-pilot.

Ted Haddon gave a sour grunt. "Quite a chore, all right, rounding everybody up and asking 'em what they know. But I guess it's the only way."

He went out with Porky Johnson, called on the persons on his list and spent a couple of hours doing it. When he was done, one other person corroborated the statements of the pilot and Big Bill. The dentist, Fraser Matthews, had heard the knock on Keller's door though he was uncertain of the time.

He'd turned in with a headache earlier in the evening, but he'd heard the knock and footsteps too.

"Footsteps?" noted the corporal. "Coming which way?"

"Down the corridor; from the west end."

Outside the dentist's office, Haddon said to Porky, "If the footsteps came from the west, it's funny Freddie didn't hear them."

Porky shrugged. "Doc Matthews was in bed at the time; he could have heard them. Freddie, though, was moving around; gettin' ready for bed." The constable got a glimpse of Haddon's thoughtful face. "Now don't start worryin' that Freddie was holdin' out on you. Freddie ain't got no reason to. He ain't that sort of a guy."

Haddon dismissed the matter till he could see the pilot again and ask him about it, and a few moments later they approached the undertaking rooms. The medical man, Doctor Kelly, came out ahead of them and Haddon hailed him.

They caught him up, and the doctor said, "Well, I did it. The autopsy."

"And what did you find?" asked Haddon.

"Lots of things. The chap must have been a confirmed alcoholic. Probably pickled, too, when he checked out. But it wasn't the alcohol that killed him. He committed suicide. I found chloral hydrate in his stomach, in the bloodstream and in the brain."

The corporal nodded slowly. "Suicide, eh? Thought you'd turn up something like that."

"Of course," added the medico, "at any other place or under any other circumstance, it might even be murder. Chloral hydrate is just knockout drops, and the strong-arm community go in for that quite a bit. And what could be dose enough to merely put one man to sleep could knock another out completely."

Again Haddon nodded. "Knockout drops, eh?"

"Could be again," Kelly suggested, "that our friend used chloral hydrate as a sleeping draught. Pretty dangerous stuff for a man in his condition, though. Which makes me think it was suicide."

They conversed for some moments on this new aspect of the case and the corporal said there would now definitely have to be an inquest.

"But I'll let you know, Doc, when it comes off. Give you lots of time."

Kelly nodded, said, "Okay," and that he had to trot along.

Haddon let him go, then decided that he and Porky might as well eat. It was nearly noon, and by the time they had finished, Jimmie Grey up at the hotel would be ready for his own lunch.

THEY retraced their steps to the hotel, and on the way there Porky said, "So there was something fishy in this business after all. Light turned off, shade up, and the door locked." Then he gave a frown. "Seems sort of screwy, man going to all that trouble just to bump himself off."

"It is screwy," Haddon agreed. "But not so screwy if you want to let yourself think about murder. If a man had a grudge against this Keller guy and wanted to rub him out, he took a simple way of doing it. Just dropped into his room, gave him a drink and pulled out again."

"Through the locked door," observed Porky.

Haddon smiled. "That's where the light and the rest of the funny stuff comes in. Look at it this way," he suggested. "If someone wanted a crack at Keller, everything was with him. Three people heard him knocking on Keller's door, but that was okay. He goes into the room and he and Keller have a few rounds of drinks. No harm in that. If anyone had found 'em together, it was all quite natural. Finally, soaking up the liquor, Keller starts to get tight, and our homicidal friend slips the knockout drops into the hooch. In a few moments Keller passes out of the picture—and the killer does the same."

"Through that locked door," reiterated the stubborn Porky.

Haddon ignored the interruption. "The killer turned the key in the lock, snapped off the light, and goes out the window. Hanging to the window-sill, he eases the window down again; then drops the eight of ten feet to the ground."

Porky nodded, squinted doubtfully. Yeah. There ain't no lights out back of the hotel, and with the light turned off in the room, this killer guy wouldn't be seen. But, he argued, "who is he? The dentist says the footsteps came from the west end of the building, from down the corridor. Who lives down that end, beside the dentist

himself, Freddie Nixon and Big Bill Stedman? Or d'you figure it was one of them?"

"It doesn't have to be one of them," Haddon pointed out. "What's down that west corridor beside rooms? You were up there just now."

Porky nodded. "Oh, yeah. You mean the outside staircase? The fire-escape? You mean the guy could have come up there?"

"What was to stop him?" countered Haddon.

Porky nodded soberly. "Which gives us the whole population of Oxide Lake to pick from."

"Small world, isn't it?" grinned Haddon. "Or was the guy who said that crazy?"

THEIR meal finished, Haddon and Porky Johnson went upstairs once more. The constable, Grey, sat in Keller's room, and Haddon told him he had better go and eat. Alone now with Porky, the corporal turned to the job in hand.

He began at the doorway, worked progressively inwards. He checked the rug, the bureau-top, the bed itself. One of the easy chairs was between the bureau and the door; the other, over near the window but facing the bed. Beside this second chair and behind the pitcher and washbowl on the washstand was an empty tumbler. Empty that is, save for a few drops of liquid in the bottom of it.

Then Haddon bent forward, sniffed. "Whiskey," he remarked, and studied the glass more closely.

Porky came forward. "Something good?" he asked.

Haddon said he wasn't sure, but he grasped the tumbler at the extreme bottom between thumb and forefinger and held it to the light.

"Here you are," he said to Porky. "A chance to prove you're the fingerprint Big Shot you claim to be. How'd you like to work this over?"

"Why not?" countered Porky. "And while I'm at it, I'll give the rest of the joint a whirl."

"Won't get you far," predicted Haddon. "The door-knob's been well handled, and that's about all there is. Could try the bureau and the window-sill. And of course, the crock."

Porky shoved on out and in a few minutes

returned with his tools of trade. He said he'd start in on the fixtures but the tumbler and the flask he'd test up at the detachment.

Haddon left him then, for he had his own particular job to do. And that was to see if there were any footprints on the ground beneath the bedroom window.

But in this he was disappointed. The ground was hard-baked; so exhausting its possibilities, he came back again to the front of the hotel. And he stood there for a moment, wondering what his next move should be.

By all appearances, Oxide Lake was very much at peace. The lake itself heaved to a gentle swell, so that the half-dozen airplanes anchored to the wharf rolled and dipped in unison. An Indian drifted home from his fishnet and a husky-dog padded across the street to flop beneath the branches of a twisted jackpine. Peace and quiet, save for the distant thudding of pneumatic drills at work—and Death, sinister and ugly, waiting to be explained.

"Tubby Ogden's," suddenly decided Haddon. "Guess that's the place to start." And he stepped out for Tubby's a half-block distant.

Tubby Ogden was definitely progressive. Not only was he the postmaster, the local druggist and the mayor of the town, but he was the publisher of the *Northern Clarion*. His weekly sheet was a brisk one, and what it lacked in size it made up in forthright reporting and pungent wit.

At the moment of the corporal's entry, Tubby was waiting on a couple of customers, but there was a rumble in the back of the store that told of the *Clarion* going to press. To kill time, Haddon walked through the gate that separated post-office from drugcounter and on into the press-room.

One man was there, bending over a clanking machine and watching gummy-looking sheets come out. When the machine stopped, Haddon said, "What's the hottest in news?"

The man turned quickly, blinked, then scowled as he pushed up his eyeshade. "Why don't you scare a guy some time?"

Jerry—"The Nose"—Beecham had, by popular legend, once been a top-flight reporter on a Chicago daily. None knew the devious channels he had travelled from the Loop to Oxide Lake, but his old-time habits

still clung to him. Little happened in Oxide Lake but The Nose sniffed it out; and once the paper was put to bed, he went on a three-day celebration.

Where he had picked up his nickname was uncertain. It could have come from his bloodhound instincts in tracking down a story, or it might just as well have come from the monstrous affair that dominated his face. But The Nose it was; and now that he turned to scowl at Ted Haddon, he was just what he looked to be—a derelict, an acid-tongued soak, a burned-out shell of a man.

He wiped his hands on a rag he pulled from his pocket. "If it's a story you got, I don't want to hear it," he told Haddon. "I know what it's going to be—about that guy croaking up at the hotel. Well, it's on the type. And we're rolling!"

"Grinding, you mean," smiled the corporal. "And what d'you know about it?"

Jerry Beecham blinked. "Me know about it? What should I? All I heard is the guy passed out from a heart attack." He squinted at Haddon curiously and his monstrous nose seemed to twitch. "Why? You really got a story?"

"I mean," explained Haddon, "what effect will it have on Gus Ryker? Or is that another thing you know nothing about?"

Beecham gave a scornful little laugh. "Everybody knows about it. And I guess what'll happen is that Gus'll stall for time." The laugh became a sneer. "Should call him 'Piker,' not 'Ryker'. He won't spend a nickel unless he sees two more coming in."

The policeman nodded thoughtfully. "That'll make it all the better for Hob Norris. Slim May says Hob offered him more for his claims on outright sale than Gus's option price."

"Slim May!" jeered Beecham. "He's the biggest liar unhung. All he's doing is putting the yarn around to run a bluff on Gus."

HADDON walked back into the drugstore to find Tubby Ogden alone. Tubby was working at the postal wicket, and for a moment or so the corporal talked with him on generalities. But when the press in the back room started up again, the corporal came down to facts. He asked Tubby, "Sold any chloral hydrate lately?"

Tubby didn't seem to understand. "Chlo-

ral hydrate?" He shook his head. "Well, not for some little time. Now and again a prescription comes in—"

"Say within the last couple of days?"

"Couple of days? Gosh, no. Nor a couple of weeks." Then Tubby suddenly asked, "Why?"

Haddon didn't answer at once. Instead, he asked Tubby if he had any chloral hydrate in the store.

Tubby left the wicket, circled the counters and led the way behind a partition marked, "Dispensary." There, he reached down a bottle held it in one sweaty hand and slapped it with the palm of the other.

Haddon frowned, said, "Too bad you had to do that. The less it was mauled about the better I'd have liked it." Then in answer to Tubby's look of mystification, he added, "It was chloral hydrate that killed that guy up at the hotel. The geologist, Keller. I'd liked to have got to that bottle first."

Tubby Ogden was nobody's fool. At once he understood the implications. "If the guy was poisoned, it didn't come from here."

Haddon quirked an eyebrow. "No? You're sure of that?"

Tubby blinked, thought about it. He seemed suddenly not so sure himself. "Of course it didn't. I'm the only one who has access to the stuff."

"Door locked all the time? Never lend the key?"

Tubby seemed suddenly embarrassed. "Guess it's nothing—" he began. "Feller shouldn't give out with crazy suggestions—"

"Skip it!" ordered the corporal. "Never mind the 'crazy suggestions'. I've got brains of my own. So who else uses the key?"

"Nobody, generally," Tubby admitted. "But once in a while I have to lend it to Jerry Beecham. Like yesterday—I lock up at noon, and Jerry wanted to get the paper lined up without staying too late. So if I'd lend him the key, he'd just slip out for coffee and a sandwich and work right on."

Haddon nodded thoughtfully. "And that's not the first time he's borrowed the key."

Tubby shook his head. "He often works nights. And hoodhounds that he is, I got to keep him going while he can."

The corporal pondered the information. "Can you tell if any of the stuff has been removed from the bottle?"

Tubby Ogden glanced down, shook his head. "Anyhow, it wouldn't take much of a jolt to kill a man."

He turned to replace the bottle on the shelf; but with an apologetic "You don't mind?" Haddon took possession of it.

The press was still rumbling as they came out of the dispensary but it was doing it unwatched. Jerry Beecham stood in the doorway of the printing room, tailoring a cigarette.

He twisted it, stuck it in his mouth and grubbed in a pocket. As Haddon came up, he said, "How about you, Ted? Got a light?"

His tone was matter-of-fact, casual; but so casual as to sound a bit overdone.

STEPPING out of the drugstore, Haddon almost bumped into Gus Ryker. Ryker's florid face was beaded with perspiration, but his relief at meeting the corporal was evident.

"Been all over town after you!" he began. "And Keller—what's this I've been hearing about him?"

Haddon grinned at the man's distress. "I wouldn't know. Suppose you tell me."

"They say he's dead—had a heart attack!" And when Haddon shrugged, Ryker's hand waved like the flippers of a seal. "But what about me and Polaris? What about the work he was doing?"

"I know," soothed the corporal. "Disgusting. But that's the way it goes. In the midst of life—"

"Aw, skip it!" moaned Ryker. "Think what it means to the company! It's too late to dig up another man now. These engineers around here, I wouldn't trust any of 'em. Hob Norris'd get to them first and tell 'em what to say. Then what'd happen?"

Haddon shuddered at the thought. "What you'd better do is to close this option without anyone's say-so and take a chance on it."

"A chance on twelve thousand dollars?" scolded Ryker. "You're talking like we're rolling in wealth!"

"Okay, then," shrugged the policeman. "Let her go to Hob Norris."

For a second or two Ryker wrestled with his misery. A red-headed, slovenly man with a weather-beaten face came out of the hardware next door, glanced sharply at Haddon and nodded to Ryker as he passed.

Ryker seemed scarcely aware of the nod, but the corporal asked, "Who's that?"

Ryker turned. "That bird? Red Millman. Got in yesterday." But he said it as though there was something more pressing on his mind. And what it was caused him to look up and give the corporal a bleak, harsh stare. "What makes you think it was a heart attack that killed Charlie Keller?"

The question caught Ted Haddon off-balance. He stalled a moment, then countered, "And why shouldn't it be a heart attack?"

Ryker said, "No reason, perhaps. But when you look at it another way, figure the stakes involved—" He seemed to hedge for an instant, then said sharply, "I think an inquest is due."

Haddon could smile at that. "You know, Gus, you're typical John Q. Public—always figuring the cops are asleep. Well, we're not asleep, even if we don't tear around in rings. We *are* holding an inquest. At the detachment. At three o'clock this afternoon."

He nodded to the miserable Gus Ryker, left him and walked up the bouldery street. Where the street terminated he struck across through the pines to a white-painted cottage. Doc Kelly met him at the door.

"What d'you know now?" asked the medical man.

"Not so much," Haddon answered. "Gus Ryker's all steamed up and hinting at dirty work. Tubby Ogden's worried because he's got chloral hydrate in the store and lends people the key. And Jerry Beecham's keeping the well-known nose to the ground." He suddenly asked, "Three o'clock for an inquest suit you?"

The doctor nodded. "At Sam Roberts'?"

"At the detachment. Though I'll have to parade the jury down to Sam's first so they can pay their respects to the dead. That is, if you've got him all put together again."

Kelly said, "He'll pass."

Haddon left; and his next call was on George Bronson.

Bronson, a lawyer whose time was spent more with drawing up deeds than fighting suits, was the resident J. P. He was a jovial, slab-sided hulk of a man with the ashes of countless cigarettes on his vest-front and the stains of them on his fingers.

"AT three? Why certainly, Teddy, my

boy. Heart attack, eh?" Bronson sat up in his chair, dusted away some of the ashes, looked at the corporal with a grin. "Remind me I start taking exercise the first of next week."

BY THE time he had rounded up his jury, Haddon noticed it was a couple of hours since he had parted with Porky Johnson. He returned to the detachment to find the constable bending over some pictures floating in a pan.

Porky looked up. "Well, I got 'em." He pointed to his pictures. "Them three came off the bureau-top. They're kind of small; could be the chambermaid's. Them other two, the good ones, I got off the tumbler we found on the washstand. And these here came off the flask."

Haddon said. "Are the tumbler prints and those on the flask the same?"

"No," Porky replied emphatically. "Grab that lens and look for yourself."

Haddon did so, to his own satisfaction. Big Bill Stedman was right then about Keller having a visitor. Now what we have to determine is whether the poison was in the flask or in the tumbler."

"Shouldn't be hard to figure that," said Porky. And he reached for the flask on the table, opened it and took a slug of what it contained.

"*Porky!*" yelled Haddon, and made a lunge at him.

Porky smacked his lips, held the flask to the light. "Good stuff," he decreed. "Tastes all right to me."

"If you're not dead in ten minutes—" began Haddon.

"Aw, forget it!" grinned Porky. "All I took won't do me no harm. Anyhow, I'm young and healthy. Only thing is," he pointed out, "if you see me starting to nod, you'll know the crock's been laced."

Haddon swore at him. "Get some mustard—throw up—"

"Oh, yeah? And ruin the whole experiment? No," said Porky; "I got something else to do. I'm off for Sam Roberts' to fingerprint the dead. Want to match his prints with either those on the flask or the tumbler." He grabbed a stamp-pad from the desk and a sheet of paper and went out.

From the doorway, Haddon's eyes followed him. To young Grey, the corporal

said, "What can you do with a goof like that?"

"Buy him a lily—if the stuff's as strong as it seems to be."

But within a few minutes the guinea-pig returned. He walked straight to the pictures he had developed, compared them with those on the sheet of paper he carried.

Haddon asked him, "You feel all right? Not sick or anything?"

"Feel fine," Porky grunted. "Should have taken a bigger jolt when I had the chance."

But he was plainly more interested in his prints than with his own condition. "You guys know something?" he asked at length. "That crock wasn't poisoned, yet they're Keller's fingerprints on it."

"But not Keller's on the tumbler?"

"No."

Haddon sat down for that. He swung his booted feet to the table-top and lighted a cigarette. For a moment he squinted at the decorations on the far wall—two sets of handcuffs, a set of leg-irons; three carbines and a sporting rifle. Grey, the second constable, moved around, whistling. Porky said, "Sb-b-b! Man working. Give him every chance."

But after a while Haddon stood up again. "The way I see it, our man comes into Keller's room, feeds him liquor and gets him tight. Keller has the flask, but the other lad contents himself with a drink or two out of the tumbler. Finally, when Keller gets properly loaded, our man gives him a snort out of another flask that's all prepared with the poison. Keller passes out, the other guy pockets the poisoned flask again and disappears. With nothing suspicious left lying around, he figures it'll look like a heart attack. And so it would have done, if he hadn't locked the door and turned out the light before he went."

Porky, still wideawake as ever, nodded cheerfully. "Now all we've got to do is to put the finger on Keller's visitor. Well, with his prints on file, maybe that won't be too tough."

"Not tough at all," agreed Haddon. "But pinning a murder rap on him, well, that's something else again."

IT APPROACHED the hour of three.

"Now when the inquest comes off," Haddon told Porky, "go ahead and spill

everything about the fingerprints you found. Lay it on thick. The murderer's hoping we fell for this heart-attack stuff, and he's going to get a jolt when he finds we don't. So scare him all you can; get him worried. What I mean, if you prod at a toad, he'll jump. Well, I'll prod this particular toad and make him jump, too. And we've got to see that he jumps our way."

Porky grinned. "Me, I like that word, murder. Makes it more interesting than this coot passing out account he couldn't handle his liquor any more. And chorng around with them fingerprints, I got to working on it. Looks to me," he decreed, oracularly, "that if the guy was killed, he was killed for a reason. And there's plenty guys around here got reason to do it."

"For instance, Hob Norris," suggested Haddon.

"Sure. Gus Ryker being the tightwad he is, he won't pick up Slim May's option without some expert advice on it. He did have an expert in Keller; but now Keller's gone, what happens? Chances are he'll drop the thing and leave Hob Norris setting on top of the world."

Haddon said, "The same reasoning would cover Slim May. His chances look better now than they did twenty-four hours ago."

"All right," agreed Porky. "Put Slim May down, too. And what about Doggy Rogers. Or Red Millman? For all we know, Red just got ahead of Doggy on them samples he sent out to Charlie Keller. Could be that Doggy wrote Keller and told him to give Red this bum report. Then when Doggy sold the claims to Big Bill Stedman, him and Keller split."

"If you're guessing's that wild," smiled Haddon, "you can even include Big Bill. Maybe Big Bill got wise that Doggy and Keller had been in cahoots and he killed him out of grudge. But as for Doggy Rogers killing him, that's a laugh. What would Doggy kill him for?"

Porky had an answer for that one. "Maybe they hadn't split yet. Maybe this Keller was in here to collect. Or maybe they'd split, and now Keller landed in here, he was scared he'd get tight and talk."

Haddon grinned. "And you've still got Red Millman."

Porky looked thoughtful. "Yeah, Red. He's the best bet. Writing him like he did,

Keller cost Red quite a piece of change. And if Red got to brooding about it, he could have taken the opportunity to square the bill. Only thing is," admitted Porky, "Red ain't in town. He's working for the Grand Slam people up on Whiterock River."

"Was," corrected the corporal. "Or still may be. But he's in town just now. Came in yesterday afternoon."

Porky said, "How d'you know? You met the guy?"

"Never in my life. But he passed Gus and me on the street today. Gus said it was him."

"Okay, then," said Porky. "With all your other suspects lined up, spare a thought to Red."

THIS inquest came off on schedule. The jury were businessmen and miners, headed by old Jeff Nichols himself; and they heard just as much of the evidence as Ted Haddon thought it good for them to know. The hotel man, the desk clerk and the dentist gave their stories, with Freddie Nixon and Big Bill Stedman contributing.

At first an air of mild boredom held the court, but when Doc Kelly explained the autopsy and the finding of the drug in Keller's system, the jury sat up. They sat up straighter still when Porky Johnson told of finding the fingerprints of a visitor to Keller's room.

Then Ted Haddon took over.

"The evidence of the drug, this chloral hydrate, dispelled at once the theory that a heart attack had been the cause of death. It appeared rather to be suicide. But here again we were confronted with one or two peculiar circumstances." He recited the facts of the locked door, the light turned out and the shade being up; and he explained his theory of why these details wouldn't go along with suicide. "No man would set about preparations for suicide in the dark. He'd need a light to see what he was doing. Nor can I imagine any man, having taken poison and feeling death upon him, going to the trouble of turning out a light and pulling up a shade. Neither happening makes sense. But when we take the whiskey flask and the tumbler, when we envision two men sitting together and drinking and one of them being found dead, the theory of suicide vanishes and we think about murder."

Coroner George Bronson broke in.

"You say, Corporal, that the evidence is, by fingerprints, that the deceased drank out of the flask and his visitor out of the tumbler. An analysis, then, of the flask will show the presence of the chloral hydrate."

"There is no chloral hydrate in the flask," stated Haddon. "That has been proved."

"How?"

With a smile, the corporal told of Porky Johnson's experiment. George Bronson scowled, mentioned something about danc-fools in general, and asked Haddon for his overall opinion.

Haddon told him, exactly as he had outlined the happening to Porky and young Grey. "The poison has gone; the visitor took it away with him. All we have left are some very excellent prints on the tumbler."

George Bronson nodded. "Then you conclude that the visitor was the man responsible for the deceased's death."

Haddon shrugged. "That's for the jury to decide."

Following a pause, Bronson, in his capacity as coroner, recalled one or two of the witnesses to the stand. He cross-examined them, then turned to Ted Haddon.

"There are angles to this case. Don't you think the inquest has been called before you're quite ready for it?"

Haddon agreed with him. "But the deceased was ready for it," he pointed out. "I didn't want to hold up burial or shipment to Winnipeg too long. Still, might I suggest an adjournment? Say for a week? In fact"—and Haddon lent certain emphasis to his words—"I think a week's adjournment will dispose of the matter entirely."

Later, with jury and spectators gone, Coroner George Bronson heaved up from his chair and lighted a cigarette. After the first satisfying drag, he squinted quizzically at Ted Haddon. "You birds are holding out on me."

"Not on you, George," smiled Haddon. "On the others. And for a reason." He told of finding chloral hydrate in Tubby Ogden's drugstore and of Jerry Beecham having access to the place. "The way I figure it is this," he explained. "The guy that nailed Charlie Keller enlisted Jerry's help. He had Jerry procure the stuff for him, and he was pretty certain that the death would pass off for a heart attack. Now that it didn't, he's worried. And since I've proved that Keller,

had a visitor just before he died, this gent's probably scared stiff. And that's what I want him to be."

Cigarette in mouth, George Bronson rocked on his heels. "Maybe it won't take long to solve this business. You've your man's fingerprints; well, fingerprint everybody and match their prints with those on the tumbler."

"Just like that. Fingerprint everybody. And what's the population of this town?"

"I don't mean it too literally," qualified Bronson. "For instance, you don't have to fingerprint my wife, or Porky here—"

"Or the Chink down at the Aurora Café," grinned Haddon.

"I mean—Good gosh, Ted! You must have some suspects!"

"Oh, sure," agreed the corporal. "Plenty of 'em. I'll get around to 'em all in time."

WHILE not actually a suspect, Ted Haddon considered Jerry Beecham one of the key characters of the case. He had nothing on him save pure logic and the man's interest in his movements behind the prescription counter; but with this in mind, he told young Grey to go pull The Nose in for a talk.

"Ten minutes with him," predicted Haddon, "and I'll know how pure he is."

But when the constable returned, he brought only bad tidings.

"I found him in the beer-parlor, tanked to the gills. Sloppy," he emphasized. "Crying in his suds."

"Maybe that's the way I'd like him," decided Haddon. "Fetch him in anyhow."

"You mean drag him? Pack him on my back?"

"Lushed as that, is he?" grunted Haddon. He debated the point. "Well, tell you what. Say about seven in the morning, go down to Sinful Sally's. That's where he rooms. Haul him out of bed while the hangover's still on him and before he starts off again. He'll be woozy then, sort of fuzzy. But don't leave it later than seven."

Porky asked what he should do. "Maybe it's an idea to check over those guys we were talking about—Red, Doggy and the rest of 'em. Find out where they were between ten and twelve last night. If they can't produce an air-tight alibi—"

"Got any more bright ideas?" suggested

Haddon. "If any of those coots did murder, they'll have their alibis all cooked up before this. Check 'em over if you like, chew the rag with 'em and make 'em think you know more than you do. But alibis—forget that stuff. It's the guys with the alibis we'll have to watch."

Porky sniffed, growled something about the brains all being in one head, and would it be all right if he shoved out for a coffee.

"Just what I want you to do," agreed Haddon. "Move around, mix, and keep your eyes and ears open."

The corporal had his own work. He typed out a report of the inquest, then found it time for supper. But throughout the typing, all during supper, he tried to figure out the why of the crime. He took the motives, the possible and the real, tore them to shreds and examined them again. He, too, visited around amongst the suspects; got the reactions of Doggy Rogers, of Hob Norris, of Slim May.

Hob Norris interested him most, so he decided to call on the man. It was late evening, but the corporal knew where he would most likely be found. Norris's property lay a hundred miles to the north and west over a route that could only be served by air, and in consequence he maintained an office and a warehouse in town. As Haddon had expected, it was in the office he found him.

He was alone, pecking out a letter on a portable typewriter, but at the corporal's unheralded entry, he looked up sharply, swung in his chair and gave a curt, "Hullo!"

Haddon wanted to put him at his ease. "Busy, eh?" he grinned. "Too bad when a company like yours makes the boss work overtime."

"Tisn't overtime," said Norris. "My job goes on for twenty-four hours a day." Then he looked a bit shrewdly at the corporal. "But you didn't come down here to sympathize with me."

Ted Haddon took a chair, stretched his legs and lighted a cigarette. Finally he looked up. "Well, what did I come down for?"

Norris waved away the offered package. "At a guess I'd say it was something to do with our friend Keller."

"Yeah? And what makes you think that?"

"Logical, isn't it?" Norris retorted. "You

suggested foul play at the inquest this afternoon, and you're not too certain that I'm not mixed up in it. Now Keller's gone, and if Ryker lives up to his cautious reputation, I stand a better chance for a crack at Slim May's claims."

"Fair enough," Haddon agreed. "Then I'll ask you a question: Are you the man that called on Keller? I mean, on the night he died?"

"Norris said, "I'm not."

The answer was flat, unhesitating, but the man swallowed hard as he said it.

"Okay," said Haddon. "Ease up. I'm not calling you a liar."

Still tense, Norris went on, "I'll admit I've no alibi for myself. I was working in the office here, just like I was when you walked in."

"All evening?"

"From supper till around eleven. Then I went to bed."

Haddon asked, "And where's bed?"

Norris chinmed towards a folding cot in a corner of the room. "I bunk in here when I'm in town. As comfortable as the hotel, and probably more clean."

"Yeah; I guess so." Haddon nodded thoughtfully. "Well, I'll have to get a statement from you. Better drop up to the detachment tomorrow morning."

"You can get it right now," offered Norris. "We've a couple of planes landing here tomorrow and I'll be busy with them." He asked, "Anything particularly legal about it?"

When Haddon said no, the man removed his letter from the typewriter and slipped in a fresh sheet. "Where do I begin?"

"From supper-time last night."

The statement didn't take long to prepare; then, at the corporal's direction, Norris signed his name to it, Haddon affixing his own as a witness.

DOOGY ROGERS, on whom the corporal next called, was affable and talkative as usual. Pressed on the matter, Doggy said he sure hadn't been near no hotel the night Keller had died. The way things was every evenin', it was all he could do to slip out a couple times for a beer. Sure, he was out them coupla times, but not more'n ten-fifteen minutes each. The first jaunt to the beer-parlor would be around eight or eight-

thirty, and the second, well, mebbe around twelve.

Asked about a witness for this, Doggy hailed Big Bill Stedman who was playing a game of snooker with a young hardrock man. The hardrock man, off-shift, looked like a bank-clerk in his ten-dollar broadcloth shirt and twenty-dollar pants, but Big Bill, booted and checkered-shirted, seemed more the part.

"Ted, here," Doggy explained to him, "wants someone's say-so that I didn't have a hand in the takin' off of Charlie Keller."

Big Bill said, "Yeah? Well, who says you didn't? The way you highjacked me on them claims—thirty-five hundred dollars—I wouldn't put nothin' beyond you."

"What the guy wants," Doggy explained, patiently, "is for you to say whether's not I went out and had a beer with you that night. Okay then. Did I?"

"You had a beer with me, sure," Big Bill declared. "But as for what happened to this Charlie Keller—" Then, catching the frown on the policeman's face, he gave a smile. "Sure, sure, Doggy, I was just fooling." He said to Haddon, "Don't need to worry about this duck, Ted. I was with him all the time."

"And what time was it?" Haddon asked.

"Just before eight. Because soon after we got there, the news broadcast come on."

"Just before eight." Haddon turned to Doggy Rogers. "That takes care of the first trip. But how about the second?"

Doggy frowned, looked a trifle worried. "Well, that time—yeah. I guess I went up alone. But Al, the beer-jerker, seen me come in and these cue-boys of mine seen me come back. And I wasn't away fifteen-twenty minutes in all."

Haddon recalled his words to Porky Johnson, "If any of these coots did murder, they'll have their alibis all cooked up before this." Well, that seemed to take care of Doggy Rogers; Doggy should go into the clear. For while Doggy had an alibi for his first trip to the beer-parlor, he had none at all for the period of time while the murder was taking place.

He smiled at the frowning Doggy. "Don't lose too much sleep over it, chum. If your conscience is clear, you haven't a thing to worry about."

He might have moved on then but just

at that moment Slim May came into the poolroom. The man crossed to the counter, threw down a dollar bill and asked for some cigarettes. Lighting one and not offering the others, he said to Haddon, "Still on the prowl?"

"Oh, still," answered the corporal. Then terminating a long, cool look at the man, he said, "Just checking up on the boys."

Slim May seemed to bristle. "Well, you don't need to check up on me."

"Don't, eh? But maybe I'll do it anyhow. So where," Haddon asked the man bluntly, "were you between eleven and twelve of the night Charlie Keller was killed?"

Slim May's retort was equally blunt. "Mindin' my own business. Drinkin' beer, to be exact."

"In the beer-parlor?"

"Where else? Or d'you know a good bootlegger?"

The corporal's color was beginning to rise. "Anyone with you?"

"Sure. Red Millman, Dink McAllister and Shorty Moss." Slim added. "We went in around eight and they chucked us out when they closed down at three."

Haddon didn't know much about Red Millman, but he knew plenty about the other two. And if there were a couple whose testimony he'd never believe, they were Dink McAllister and Shorty Moss. For they worked no more than they had to, and if they weren't soured each night before the beer-parlor closed, it was because the chiseling was poor or their credit had run out on them.

But apparently the two were pals of Slim; and for the love of him or the beer his money would buy, they'd swear their souls to perdition.

"So you're sitting pretty," grunted the corporal. "But that won't stop you from trotting up to the detachment tomorrow and putting it down on paper. And, Doggy," he told the poolroom man, "that goes for you, too."

He walked out then; but once outside, he had an idea. He retraced his steps and asked Doggy where would be a good place to start looking for Red Millman. Doggy suggested the man's own shack at the other end of town.

"You've seen it," said Doggy. "A log place, hundred yards or so back of the Con-

solidated's warehouse." When Haddon said he remembered the building, Doggy pointed out that Red might be abed. "He's a trapper most of the year and can't take late hours like the rest of us. Ain't used to it, I guess," hazarded Doggy. "Like me. I found it tough till I got in the groove."

A light showed in the shack when Haddon was still some distance away, but he struck cross-country, tripped over rocks, lumber-piles and the trash of a mining-camp, and was rewarded by a short "Come in!" when he banged on the door.

At close range, hatless and by the light of a kerosene lamp, Red Millman was somewhat less than imposing. He had a long narrow face, big ears and the making of a squat. At the moment he was apparently preparing for bed, for he sat barefooted on the edge of a bunk of peeled poles with his braces down and his shirt unbuttoned. In a swift glance Haddon noticed that the bunk was the most important bit of furnishing in the shack. The rest comprised a cookstove with jam-cans for legs, an oil-cloth-covered table and a small trunk in a corner. But he realized that this would merely be Red's hangout for the short periods he spent in town. His real camp, his home, would be on the trapline, north.

Haddon asked Red pretty much the same question that he had put to Slim May, the question concerning his whereabouts of the night of the murder between the hours of eleven and twelve. And the answer was as prompt. Up in the beer-parlor with a few of the boys.

"The boys, eh?" noted Haddon. "What boys?"

"Slim May and a couple guys named Dink McAllister and Shorty Moss."

That checked; but the policeman expected it to. "And you stayed there all night?"

"Till closin' time. Then I headed home."

The corporal spread his legs, offered Red a cigarette and took one himself. With both cigarettes lighted, he asked, "Guess you know why I'm asking you all this?"

Red Millman shrugged. "I ain't dumb. You're wonderin' if I had a hand in this Keller affair."

Haddon nodded slowly. "You knew the guy?"

"Knew him?" Red gave a grunt that was

half a laugh. "No. And I wish I'd never heard of him."

"Gave you a bum steer, didn't he?"

"A few thousand dollars' worth." Then Red shrugged again. "But I ain't kickin'. Shoulda found out more about th' guy."

"You figure he gypped you?"

"Gypped me?" Red seemed puzzled. "How could he gyp me? What I figure, he didn't know his stuff. Or somep'n went wrong with them tests he made."

"What did he say about 'em? I mean, about the samples?"

Red gave a half-glance towards the trunk in the corner. "Said they only run around five bucks the ton and wasn't worth botherin' with."

Haddon, noticing that half-glance, asked, "Did you keep that letter? Still got it by you?"

"Sure I kep' it. Keep all business letters I get."

Unless a fur-circular was a letter, Haddon doubted that Red received three business letters in a year. But apparently it flattered the man's ego to keep what he did receive. For Red crossed to the trunk, flung up the lid and burrowed into a cigar-box in the tray.

He pulled out one piece of paper after another, squinted at each in turn, then landed on one which he gave to the corporal. "There y're. Read her for yourself."

The trend of the letter was much that Red had intimated. Keller Minerals, "per C. K.", begged to advise Mr. Millman that an assay of his samples showed that the gold-content ran scarcely five dollars to the ton. Which content was not generally considered the worth of development.

Haddon read the thing through twice. It was clear, emphatic. There was no mistaking its meaning. Keller Minerals had undertaken the assay, and they had left no loop-hole of escape for themselves. Which would seem to back up all that Doggy Rogers had suggested—that Red Millman alone was to blame; that his samples were pyrite stuff, poor stuff, actually running to no more than the five bucks a ton.

But how was Red Millman to know this? All Red knew was that Doggy had made a killing over the same property and that Keller Minerals—per Charlie Keller—were responsible.

Haddon folded the letter and studied his man, Dimwit, Porky had called him; though Red considered himself anything but dumb. Yet dumb and dimwit both, Red Millman must have been a forgiving and unsuspicious soul if he could dismiss the affair as an error in judgement. Right now, instead of running a poolroom in town like Doggy was doing, Red was just a plug-along trapper getting nowhere fast.

Or was he so dumb? So much a dimwit? If Ted Haddon were looking for a motive for murder, he had one right in his hand—this costly bum steer from Charlie Keller. And far from being dumb, was this Red Millman merely putting on an act? Haddon didn't know; but this forgiving streak, this let-bygones-be-bygones didn't sit so well on the red-headed jasper swinging his legs over the edge of the bunk.

Haddon suddenly asked, "Can I borrow this letter for a few days?"

Red Millman frowned. He didn't know. He'd kep' the thing quite a while—

"And you can still keep it," Haddon assured him. "Only now that Keller's dead, this is sort of handy to have. Gives his firm's name, business address. Sure," coaxed the corporal, "I'll let you have it back right away."

HEADING HOME, Ted Haddon realized that he was tired. The day had been long and arduous, and it was now approaching midnight. He thought of the interviews he had had with Porky's suspects within the past hour or so and wondered if his toad was among them. And if the toad was getting ready to jump. One thing he'd promised himself, and that was that he'd definitely make medicine with Jerry Beecham in the morning. If Beecham were involved in Keller's death, and if it got around that he was up at the detachment for a sweating, a reaction, a move, a jump should be coming in short order.

The jump came, though it was scarcely the sort that Ted Haddon had expected. Constable Grey returned to the detachment after breakfast with the news that Jerry Beecham hadn't been home all night.

Haddon received the news soberly. It might mean nothing; it might mean anything. He ordered Porky and Grey out on an immediate search for The Nose.

But little came of it till nearly eleven-thirty that day, when the corporal learned from a couple of men that The Nose had turned up in a muskeg right back of Sinful Sally's boarding-house.

"Sleepin' it off," one man offered. The other man said, "I heard the old buzzard was dead."

The corporal hurried for the spot at the west end of town and was guided to the focal point by a patch of color through the trees. The color was the red-checkered shirt of old Jeff Nichols.

Porky was there ahead of him, and the constable was bellowing a lament to heaven.

"You guys all come bustin' in here! Ain't you got no brains? If there was a track or anything to see, you sure gummed her up now!"

Haddon elbowed through the ring of onlookers, sank ankle-deep in the springy moss and came into the center of things. On his back, mouth agape and cushioned amongst the hummocks, lay the man he had been hunting for.

"Pretty, ain't he?" Porky grunted. Someone sure took care of him!"

Haddon moved around, followed the pointing toe of Porky's jackboot. Jerry Beecham's head was caved in, and the moss was red-stained beneath it.

"Get it?" suggested Porky. He thrust out his chin, indicating, through the trees, Sinful Sally's boarding-house. "This coot came home last night tanked, and they were laying for him. Knocked him out up there, then packed him down here and finished him off."

"Yeah," nodded Haddon, frowningly.

"I'll stick around," offered Porky, "if you want to go up there and see what you can see." He glared at old Jeff Nichols and the rest of the onlookers. "Mebbe this herd of bulls ain't got her all tramped up like they have down here."

The corporal struck off, realizing that if a search of the ground was to be made, now was the time to do it. But he wasn't too optimistic of results. The whole townsite was built on bedrock, and tracks around Sinful Sally's would be as improbable as they had been back of the hotel.

And so he found things to be. There was the odd scratch or two amongst the lichen where the bedrock showed, and in the

patches of dried earth; but there was no proper track of any kind.

He went back to Porky again with a shake of the head. To the gathered crowd of morbid spectators, he said, "Wouldn't want you birds to come down here for nothing. Come on; four of you pack him over to Sam Roberts'."

He told Porky to go along, then spent ten or fifteen minutes going over the ground surrounding in search of the murder weapon. But he was once more disappointed. Whoever had been smooth enough in planning the killing had been equally smooth in carrying the weapon away.

"So what?" he asked himself grimly. "The toad jumped, all right; but what do we get out of it? Two murders instead of one—and little to work on in either."

Insofar as the case of Jerry the Nose was concerned, he could put his two constables onto the routine stuff. They could poke around, ask questions, try to find out who had seen Jerry last. He, himself, would go at things from a different angle.

So, in time, he reviewed the case, as well as the case of the death of Keller. He spent three hours typing out the facts as he knew them. He studied the fingerprint photographs, the whiskey-flask, the tumbler; and went back over his interviews with everyone from Hob Norris to Red Millman. Night fell with seemingly nothing accomplished, and he woke next day to a sense of futility.

HE HAD an idea in his mind, vague, sketchy; but if he followed it, its windings and involutions were as tortuous as any of the others. He lay in his cot and considered its implications, then he decided he might as well get up and put on a fire.

He started the thing, yelled at Porky and Grey, and went out to fetch a pail of water. And, as he opened the door, he found his toad had jumped again.

A piece of paper had been wedged between the door and the jamb. The opening of the door caused it to flutter to his feet. He set down the pail, picked the paper up and read the words scrawled across it—*"Ask Norus about his deal with Keler."*

He forgot about water, fire and everything else. Backing into the room, he sat down on the cot and scrutinized the paper.

It was a torn sheet, evidently half a page

ripped across from a writing-pad. The words were all printed in capital and the printing itself was grotesque.

"Ask Norris about his deal with Keller," Haddon muttered. "Norris—and Keller."

He squinted, frowned, was almost unconscious of Porky's presence till the constable ranged alongside tucking his shirt-tail into his breeches. Then he heard Porky speak. "Postman been already?"

Haddon looked up then. "Yeah," he said slowly. "Special Delivery." He laid the paper on a nearby chair and invited Porky's attention to it.

The constable rubbed the sleep from his eyes, perused the thing and asked what it meant.

"The toad," said Haddon. "We're prod-ing him sort of hard."

Grey appeared soon after. There was a three-way conference. Porky said, "Do I try it for fingerprints? Though there ain't much chance of that."

Haddon told him it would be all right, that he'd handled it tenderly himself; then with Grey he started breakfast, leaving Porky to his scientific experiments.

But the breakfast was better than the experiments. Porky gave up at last, saying that the guy who wrote the note wasn't co-operating at all.

"Maybe he is," pointed out Haddon. "Through Hob Norris."

"You really figure Norris is mixed up in it?" asked Grey.

"Certainly he's mixed up in it," stated the corporal. "And I hope I'm beginning to see the light."

He finished breakfast, shaved, and dug a black plastic cigarette case from a club-bag in his room. Armed with this, he said he was going down to have another talk with Hob Norris.

The talk could only have lasted half an hour or so, for when he returned he was wearing a look of satisfaction. He produced the cigarette case from inside a handkerchief in his tunic pocket and laid it carefully on the table in front of Porky Johnson.

"Like candy from a kid," he told Porky. "Try this for fingerprints."

Porky didn't understand. "Who's?"

"Hob Norris's," explained Haddon. I of-fered him a smoke and he took one. But

the case interested him more. He mauled it around, admiring it." Haddon added, "You won't find any of mine on there. I handled it carefully, beside wiping it clean first."

Porky started in with enthusiasm. He dug out his dusting-powder, lens, camera. In the meantime, Ted Haddon had a letter he wanted to write and get off to Winnipeg. If the letter brought results, the week's adjournment of the inquest would be shortened. It could also simplify another inquest that would have to follow—the one on Jerry Beecham. The letter would go out by air-mail at noon, and two days should bring a reply.

But it took longer than the typing of the letter for Porky to get done with the cigarette case. But when he had, he carried a print over to a filing-cabinet, compared it with another he unearthed there, and brought both over for Haddon's inspection.

"Take a look!" he crowed. "Identical twins! Those were Hob Norris's fingerprints on the tumbler in Keller's room!"

TWO DAYS later, the inquest on Charlie Keller was resumed. There were the same jurymen, almost the same crowd in the detachment. And all the previous witnesses.

And once again, Corporal Ted Haddon, resplendent for the occasion in red serge and sidearms, outlined the facts. He described the finding of Keller's body, the result of the autopsy, and the evidence of the chloral hydrate in the dead man's system. He touched again on the tumbler left on the washstand, proof positive that Keller had had a visitor in his room before he died; and when he got done with this, he displayed and read the note that had been left in the detachment door.

He spent some time on the note.

"It's crudely printed," he observed, "and the names, 'Norris' and 'Keller', are misspelled." He passed the paper to the jurors for their inspection, retrieved it again and went on. "The note could have been written by an illiterate; but I don't think it was. I've copied the thing several times myself, and my conclusion is that it was purposely written by a man using his left hand and pur-posely misspelled to throw me off."

He paused, produced the two photographs of fingerprints that Porky had made. "One of these photographs," he pointed out, "is

of fingerprints found on a tumbler in Keller's room. The other was taken off this black plastic cigarette case of mine." Dramatically, he turned to Coroner George Bronson. "Will you please call Mr. Norris to the stand."

The coroner frowned, gathered himself together and ordered Hob Norris to step forward.

Haddon straightened, hooked thumbs in his Sam Browne. "Now, Mr. Norris," he asked. "Did you call on Charlie Keller on the night he died?"

Norris didn't reply at once. He glanced at the cigarette case, at the two prints lying on the blanket-covered table. Haddon could see the struggle going on within him. Then he squared his shoulders, and harshly said, "Yes!"

The corporal allowed a few seconds to go by. There was a dead silence in the room, not a stir nor the scrape of a foot.

"Perhaps then," the corporal suggested to Hob Norris, "you would like to tell us just why you made that call and all about it."

This time Norris showed no hesitation. In the same harsh, defiant voice, he said, "I called on him to try to make a proposition with him. I offered him a thousand dollars cash to give an adverse report on Slim May's property so that Gus Ryker would let the option go. And he turned me down."

"I see." Haddon gave a nod. "And what time of night would that be?"

"Ten-thirty or eleven. And I left again around eleven-thirty or a quarter to twelve."

Coroner George Bronson broke in. "Describe that interview, Mr. Norris."

Norris said, "It was friendly. He had a bottle in the room and we had a drink. There was only one glass, so he filled it up for me and drank out of the bottle himself. There was no row, no argument. I made him the proposition, and he rejected it. Rejected it flatly. We talked around, and I went back at him two or three times. Then when I found I was getting nowhere, I said goodnight and came away."

Haddon asked, "Came away how? And how did you get in? Into the hotel?"

"Up the back staircase and down the corridor." With a wintry smile, Norris said, "I didn't want to advertise the fact that I was calling on him."

"I see. And that's how your fingerprints

came to be on the tumbler in the room?"

"Yes. I sat in a chair near the window; and when I'd finished my drink, I put the glass on the washstand."

Haddon said, "Just one more question: What was Keller like when you left?"

"You mean, drunk or sober?" Norris shrugged. "Sort of half-and-half. He kept taking a swig from the bottle as we went along."

Haddon excused the man then and directed his remarks to the coroner.

"When this inquest is concluded, we will hold another. On Jerry Beecham. But before that comes about, I hope to show that Beecham was instrumental in bringing about the death of Charlie Keller. I'll show that he procured the drug from Mr. Ogden's drug-store one noon that he was working alone and that he turned it over to the man who murdered Keller directly. And now I would like to have Frank Millman called to the stand."

SUSPICIOUS, about frightened to death, S Red Millman shuffled forward. Sworn, Ted Haddon began to talk to him.

He produced the letter from the Keller Minerals, valuing Red's samples at five dollars the ton, and held it so that Red might recognize it. Asked if he did, Red said, "Sure!"

Haddon read the letter aloud for the benefit of the jury and laid it aside. Then he picked up another paper from a collection he had on the table-top.

"This" he told the jurors, "is a statement typed out and given to me a few nights ago by Mr. Norris concerning his movements on the night that Keller died. I have had Constable Johnson photograph both the letter from Keller Minerals and Mr. Norris's statement and reproduce them on a large-scale grid." He passed the result to the jury and drew their attention to details. "You will observe certain oddities," he told them. "In both cases, the 'r' falls a little below the line and the 'm' quite a bit above it. You will notice that the 'f' leans to the right and that the top of the capital 'B' is chipped or broken. In other words, gentlemen, it is quite evident that the letter purporting to be from the Keller Minerals was typed on the same machine as the statement of Hob Norris."

Norris was on his feet, but the corporal called him sharply to order.

"Sit down!" he told him. "There's a witness on the stand. You'll get your chance after a while."

When the jurors had seen their fill of the two photographs and Haddon had retrieved them, the corporal turned to the coroner.

"My examination of the witnesses may seem somewhat irregular, but I'm trying to construct a picture in my own way. Mr. Norris has told you how he gained access to the upper floor of the hotel by use of the outside staircase. Bearing this in mind, you will recall the matter of Keller's door being locked on the inside. You will wonder if, with Death reaching for him, Keller got over to the door and locked it himself. I don't think he did. What I think happened is that Keller's murderer used neither the outside staircase or the inside one to make his escape. You will recall the light in the room being out and the window-shade being up. I hope to prove that the murderer himself locked the door, switched out the light and let up the shade; that he raised the window, lowered himself outside, closed the window and dropped the short distance to the ground. And to help prove my point, I'd like to have Henry Rogers called for examination."

Henry 'Doggy' Rogers came forward, a fine sweat on his brow. He looked around, tugged at the neck of his shirt and acted as though the gallows-trap was ready and waiting to receive him. He took the oath, scrubbed his jaw and blinked fearfully up at Ted Haddon.

"Henry Rogers," began the corporal. "You are the man who staked a certain property up on Kasbin Lake. Kasbin Lake, mind you. Not this property of Slim May's over on Rocky Lake."

Doggy nodded, gulped, said, "Yeah."

"And later you turned it over to Mr. Stedman for a wad of cash."

Again Doggy nodded. "But no wad. Only thirty-five hundred."

"Now," suggested the corporal, "will you please tell this court what induced you to go up to Kasbin Lake in the first place? What made you think that gold might be there?"

Doggy shrugged, scratched his balding head. "Well, I dunno. I guess it was Bill Stedman's idea. He'd grubstaked me a

coupla times; and when I went out this Spring, he said that as Red Millman had found some sort of stuff up on Kasbin, it might be a good idea to check over that neck o' the woods. So after I'd ast Red where at he'd seen that stuff of his, I shoved off up there."

Haddon said, "Thanks. I think that'll be all."

Doggy blinked again, then suddenly realized the luck that was his. He returned to his seat, pulled out a red polka-dot handkerchief and mopped his face and neck. Haddon, for his part, picked up the letter from Keller to Red Millman.

"Your Honor," he said, addressing Coroner Bronson, "it is fairly evident that this letter is a complete forgery. It was typed right here in Oxide Lake. It is very evident to me, because I wrote to the police in Winnipeg and had them make a search of the Keller office files. I was certain that a carbon copy of the original would be kept, and it reached me by air-mail today." Haddon displayed a yellow sheet. "Here, then, is the duplicate of the original, the true letter written by Charlie Keller to Red Millman. In it, the assayed figure of Red's samples is given at a hundred and seventy-three dollars to the ton. Which is somewhat different to five."

A ripple went through the crowd. There was a craning of necks, a low murmur. Haddon went on:

"So I think I've proved that the letter that Red Millman actually received was a forgery. The receipt of that letter caused Millman to lose all interest in the Kasbin Lake property, and it put Doggy Rogers in the chips. I've also proved that this forged letter was written on a typewriter belonging to Mr. Norris. Now," and he turned to Hob Norris, "do you have something you wish to say?"

Norris was on his feet. "I most certainly do!" He asked, "What's the date of that letter? That forged letter to Red Millman?"

The corporal knew it by heart. "The tenth of September, last year."

"A year ago," rapped Norris. "Well, I didn't own that typewriter then. I bought it just this Summer."

"And whom did you buy it from?"

"From Bill Stedman."

Interest in the case was quickening,

Step by step, each man present knew that Haddon's method was leading up to some definite climax. Haddon himself addressed the coroner once more.

"Your Honor, I would like to draw on my imagination, if I may. I would like to go back to the time that this letter of Keller's to Red Millman arrived here in Oxide Lake.

"It is quite probable that if Millman had shown his samples around, some certain parties might have seen their worth. It is highly probable, too, that these parties knew of Red sending them out for analysis, and they would be naturally anxious to know the assay results. I think that after some deliberation on the matter, they decided to approach our deceased friend, Jerry Beecham. Working in the printing office, which is connected to the drug-store and post-office, Jerry wouldn't have too much difficulty in gaining access to any mail that came in. So with Jerry on the lookout, when the letter for Red Millman arrived, it was intercepted, and opened.

"After that things were simple. Jerry ran the printing-press, and it was no trick at all for him to run off a letter-head similar to the original from Charlie Keller's office. It was no trick, either, to forge a letter, setting the assay findings at five dollars the ton instead of a hundred and seventy-three. Least trouble of all was it to scrawl a 'K' in imitation of Keller's initial beneath the 'Keller Minerals'."

The corporal paused for a moment, then in deliberate tones, went on again.

"Everything would have been fine if Gus Ryker hadn't suddenly taken the notion to fetch Charlie Keller in here to inspect Slim May's Rocky Lake property. But that made things bad. Red Millman suddenly showed up in town, and if he heard of the geologist's arrival and decided to tangle with him over the bum steer he'd been given, the truth would come out. The jig would be up and certain citizens would land in the pen for a lengthy stretch.

"But here again," said Haddon, "Jerry Beecham proved to be the ace-in-the-hole. With access to the drug-store, he could provide the means to take care of Charlie Keller. And Jerry, who probably ran into some pretty tough mugs in his early Chicago days, knew all about chloral hydrate. So against

that pen stretch, he risked it. He swiped the drug and turned it over to the proper party."

Haddon paused, looked over the crowd. At the back, leaning against a wall near the door was Big Bill Stedman. The man's arms were folded across his red-checkered shirt, but the fingers of one hand were kneading his chin.

And his eyes were on Haddon. They were intent, watchful, studying the corporal from under lowering brows. Haddon looked back at him. It was as though each were reading the other's mind.

BUT on the other side of the door-frame stood Porky Johnson. The constable, too, was in his red serge and wearing side-arms. Porky was as big as Bill Stedman; easy-going, perhaps, but as powerful, and as tough. Porky knew just why he had been stationed there, and he was readying for anything. So Ted Haddon went on again.

"Yes, Jerry Beecham was a valuable man. He could intercept a letter, could duplicate a sheet of stationery and could get hold of poison when the need arose. But with all this, he had one weakness. He boozed too much. And in booze he might talk. Not about the forgery and the swindling of Red Millman, for Jerry made all right out of that. Looking into things, I find that he owns, or did own till the day he died, a thousand shares of a certain mining-stock. As the shares are about at par, I'd like to know where Jerry Beecham got hold of a thousand dollars to buy himself this little nest-egg. But perhaps he didn't buy it; perhaps it was the wages of sin. Well," shrugged Haddon, "the Bible was right." The wages of sin is Death. For while Jerry might be trusted to keep his mouth shut about the Millman swindle, the murder of Charlie Keller was something else. And the murderer of Charlie Keller couldn't take a chance on that."

Once more Haddon reached something from the table. Or rather, two things. Two pieces of paper.

"Now this note," he told both the interested George Bronson and the equally interested jury and spectators, "this anonymous note that was wedged in my door the other night—The man who wrote me thought he was smart. He was worried, plenty worried. He had taken it for granted that Keller's

death would be attributed to a heart attack. When it came out as murder, he was on the spot. He tried to get out of this by eliminating Jerry Beecham and the possibility of Jerry squealing, and to play doubly safe, he decided to shove the whole responsibility onto the shoulders of Hob Norris."

Haddon read the note aloud again. "'Ask Norris about his deal with Keller.' Well, gentlemen," he observed, "the smart guy who wrote that note isn't as smart as he thinks himself. Hob Norris admits, as the note suggests, that he visited Keller on the night he died and tried to make a deal with him. But I'll ask you—*how did the writer of the note know anything about the visit?* Hob admits leaving the room only a short while before Keller died; and it is quite evident that after taking the steps of secrecy he did to get in and out of the room that he wouldn't broadcast the motive for his visit to anyone else. So the question remains—*how did the writer of the note know anything about it?*

"Well, I'll tell you. The writer of that note was the man who poisoned Charlie Keller. He left his room in the hotel, crossed the hallway and knocked lightly on Keller's door. Norris had only just left and Keller was still up. So this poisoner is admitted, and he finds his man—as Norris intimated—about half-seas over. That made it easier. He gives Keller a few more drinks out of a good bottle and Keller's tongue begins to loosen. He may have been an honorable man where a crooked deal was concerned, but he liked his drink. And when he gets crooked enough, he spills the deal that Norris had tried to make with him.

"That gives the killer an idea. He knows now that Hob Norris has been in the room. If by any fluke the heart attack is challenged, Hob can take the rap. Later, at the inquest, he hears of the tumbler being found on the washstand with certain unidentified fingerprints on it. The killer knows that as they weren't his, they must be Hob's. So, when the heat is on, he decides to turn Hob in, knowing full well that we'll fingerprint him and compare his prints with those on the glass.

"But as I say," declared Haddon, forcefully, "he fooled himself. By that note, by

the information it contained, he told me that he himself had been in the room *after* Hob left; that Keller must have been alive at that time to be able to tell the note-writer of the deal Hob had tried to make with him. Then all that was left for me was to locate the man who had written the note. And when I had found him, I'd have the murderer of both Charlie Keller and Jerry Beecham."

SLOWLY, dramatically, the corporal held the note between the finger and thumb of his left hand. The upper edge of the paper was torn, ragged. He took the other piece of paper in his right hand, brought it up, so that the two ragged edges fitted and matched.

"I procured a warrant to search a certain room in the Hotel Northern," he began. "I was looking for a writing pad, of the linen-finish type. I found it; and I knew I had found it because the top page was a half-page, left there when the lower part of the sheet was ripped off. And finally," he concluded, "on the writing-pad, beneath the torn-off half-page, there were faint impressions—letters, words, the result of a man bearing down too hard as he wrote with his unaccustomed left hand."

There was a sudden commotion at the back of the room. Big Bill Stedman was no longer against the far wall nor Porky Johnson against the door jamb. But there was the occasional flash of a red serge, though this was lost as a dozen hardrock men wheeled and drove in.

But the rumpus was over in a minute, terminated by the sudden clang of the door of the steel cage in a connecting room. The jurymen stood on their chairs, looked their fill, turned and sat down again. Coroner Bronson straightened his vest, brushed imaginary ashes from it and looked severe.

"Your verdict, gentlemen?" he asked the jury.

Old Jeff Nichols, in his capacity of foreman, raised tufted white brows.

"Verdict? Whaddya mean, verdict? Only one there could be—that Ted Haddon's made a danged good job of things!" He jerked a thumb in the general direction of Big Bill Stedman and a green steel cage. "Let him try and wriggle outta that!"

Another Dead Man, More or Less

EYE FOR AN EYE

By DAY KEENE



IT WASN'T the murder that mattered. Another dead man, more or less, meant little to Jack Maddox. The cashier of the Fairview bank wasn't the first man the former jockey had killed. It was the third eye that haunted Maddox. One moment the cashier's forehead had been white and placid.

"Quit kidding," he had chuckled.

The next moment a small brown eye that wept red tears had appeared on his white

brow as if by magic. It wasn't magic. That much Maddox knew. It was the natural result of a thirty-eight-calibered slug impelled by his own nervousness.

But from the split-second in which it had appeared it had haunted his every waking moment and his dreams. It had grown from dime to ogre size. Even now with comparative safety only minutes away, hurtling his car through the lonely Michigan night along the road he had known as a boy, the eye,

still oozing bloody tears, jolted along the gravel road before him, flanked by the headlights of his car.

A flashily dressed man, his dark face deeply lined with dissipation, Maddox wondered, as he had wondered a good many times during the past three days, if he was losing his mind. It was natural he should be jumpy. Sticking up a bank and killing a man in the process was serious business. On the other hand, he had gotten away clean. The cashier had died instantly. There had been no one else in the bank to finger him to the police. According to the short-wave broadcasts he had tuned into, even the make of his car was unknown.

There was no reason why the wound should haunt him, or why it should look like an eye. But it did. An unnaturally large eye, strangely reminiscent of some eye that had terrified him before. He tried, in vain, to remember where or when.

He felt like a fool and a weakling to allow the eye to bother him. It was merely a product of his mind. It had to be. Disembodied eyes didn't keep pace with speeding cars. Passing the old mill pond where he had fished as a boy Maddox forced himself to think of the money in the portable typewriter case on the back seat of the car. To hell with the eye. Forty-eight thousand dollars was a lot of money in anybody's language. He intended to make his Spanish as soon as the heat cooled off. He would hole up in Perry for a month or two, then take off for Juarez. A few slugs of tequila and a black-eyed senorita or two under his belt and the eye would cease to haunt him. It wasn't real. It was nerves and a guilty conscience. At least so he hoped.

Perry hadn't changed since the last time he had seen it. That had been at his father's funeral almost three years before. A garage, three general stores, a school, the M. E. church, and that was it. Being a Thursday night there were few cars parked at the curb. The farmers still came in on Wednesday and Saturday nights as they had done when he was a boy. He wondered what people saw in such a burg. There wasn't even a tavern, a movie, or a poolroom. He would go nuts if he had to live in such a place. He had almost gone nuts as a boy. That was why he had run away.

Miami, New York, Chicago, New Or-

leans, L. A. Those were the towns in which a man could get some action for his money, or anyone else's money for that matter.

BRAKING in front of Joe Convers' general store he debated giving the car the gas and heading right on for El Paso but native caution restrained him. A man was always reading in the papers about some wise guy being picked up for speeding or running a red light and turning out to be the guy who had killed the six old ladies with the hatchet. And he couldn't afford to have that happen to him. He doubted he could explain away the money. A Jock who had been set down and hadn't had a leg up in two years would have one hell of a time explaining where he had gotten forty-eight thousand dollars. No. It was better this way. He would hole up for a month or two then, just before taking off again, he could air mail or express the money to himself in El Paso.



Convers had changed since Maddox had last seen him. Formerly a fleshy man, the storkeeper's skin fitted him like a handed-down overcoat three sizes too large. In the dim light of the hanging lamp he peered at Maddox over his glasses. "Well, I'll be damned," he recognized him finally. There was no joy in the recognition. "What you doing back in Perry?"

"I've come back to farm the old place," Maddox lied. He added glibly, patting the typewriter case, "Also to write my memoirs. You see, despite what you or anyone else

may think, them Jockey Club officials framed me. I never threw that race and I've contracted to write the whole truth for a newspaper syndicate."

"Oh," Convers said. "I see." He wanted to believe him. The elder Maddox had been his friend and Jack was a home-town boy. "And you've come back to the old home place where it was quiet to write it, huh?" Maddox beamed. "That's right."

He bought a fair-sized order, a side of bacon, beans, flour, canned goods, and paid for it with the last of his own money. From now on he would have to spend the bank's money. The thought amused him until he saw the eye regarding him cynically from the general vicinity of the cold hot-blast stove. Then his lowering eyes saw the silver star on Convers' sagging vest, and the single word on it—Sheriff.

Convers noticed him looking at the star. "Yeah. I've been sheriff for two years now," he offered. His smile was wry. "That's how come I'm in the shape I'm in. I shot it out with a car full of hoodlums from up Lansing way one night last spring and I've never quite got back on my feed."

Maddox asked him what they'd done.

"Robbed a bank," Convers said curtly.

He offered no details. Maddox asked for none. The air in the store was suddenly stifling. It seemed incredible that Convers should not also see the eye and recognize it for what it was. He gathered his packages together and Convers' voice stopped him at the door.

"Welcome home, Jack," he said quietly. "But no funny stuff now. Remember. And I don't want to find any of those Jockey Club officials who 'framed' you hanging around the farm."

"Oh, no," Maddox said virtuously. It was difficult for him to breathe in the presence of both the eye and a star. He patted the money-stuffed typewriter case. "I expect to be quite alone. Have to be, you know, to concentrate."

"I see," Convers said dryly. A smile played over his lips. He started to say something, changed his mind. "Well, you may not be quite as alone as you think."

THE words bothered Maddox all the way to the farm. *You may not be quite as alone as you think.* What did the old fool

mean by that? Surely Convers wasn't suspicious of him, surely he didn't mean to put a stake-out on the farm. He had no reason to. There was no alarm out for him. He could return to his own farm if he wanted to. And if Sheriff Convers or any other fool rubs came nosing around—

The gun with which he had killed the cashier was suddenly heavy in his pocket. He should have thrown it away days ago but he had been afraid to. It was the only gun he had. And there was such a matter as ballistics. He was carrying his own death warrant in his pocket.

Cold sweat beading his cheeks he drove slowly on down the road, being careful to observe the twenty-five mile speed limit. The farm was four miles from town and Maddox cursed as he turned off the highway onto the soft sand road that led back through the scrub. Damn the fat cashier for a fool. Why hadn't he put up his hands? There had been no need for him to die.

The back door of the farmhouse was unlocked. Using his flashlight he located an oil lamp and lighted it. Dust lay thick on everything but everything he remembered was in its familiar place. There was the cloth-screened food safe, the battered dining room table with the revolving cruet in the center of the red and white checked cloth. The matched mohair suite and the ornately carved melodeon were in the parlor. The sitting room where the family had spent their evenings still held the same old sagging leather couch and the familiar rocking chairs. Nothing was missing.

Nothing was damaged. The fact amused him. The neighboring farmers were fools. He had expected to have to camp out, to find the place looted. It would have been in any large city he could name.

Piling his purchases on the kitchen table he brought in his bags from the car and taking a quart of whiskey from one of them drank deeply. To hell with the eye. Let it haunt him. He, Jack Maddox, had successfully robbed a bank. He had forty-eight thousand dollars and once he had disposed of the gun and stashed the money no one would be able to pin a thing on him. He would drop the gun down the well in the morning, he decided. Or, better still, pitch it out into the bog that joined the back wood lot. He drank again to his own cleverness.

Set down for life or not he had done damn well for a farm boy.

The rooms smelled sour. The air was stale. He opened several of the windows, propped them up with sticks, and finding some mouldy blankets on a closet shelf made up a bed of sorts on the couch. Tomorrow he could look up sheets and things. Now all he wanted was sleep, sleep that would blot out the accusing eye. Ever since he had entered the house it had perched over one of the rocking chairs and was seemingly rocking placidly. To hell with it.

Pushing the money case under the couch he kicked off his shoes and lay down, the bottle handy to his hand.

Life was funny. He had punked along for years, pulling this horse, giving that one a speed-ball, stealing peanuts. Now he could buy a stable if he wanted one. Perhaps he would. What with the señoritas and the cheap booze and the current rate of exchange life was going to be sweet in Mexico. At five pesos to the dollar he was worth almost a quarter of a million dollars Mex.

Some of his whiskey courage wore off and he nipped at the bottle again before making certain the eye was still watching him. It was. *If only he knew where he had seen it before it had appeared on the cashier's forehead. If he could only puzzle that out, or perhaps go to a psychiatrist, then it might go away.*

He drank again and again until the bottle was empty and he was forced to unc cap a fresh one. Still sleep failed to come. It grew to be two, then three o'clock in the morning. He padded barefooted out to his car and locked it. He bolted the door and closed the windows, afraid—of he knew not what. As the long night grew into dawn the rocking eye developed an invisible, intangible, body. From time to time it left the chair. Once he even thought he heard it padding barefooted around the house but was too frightened to do anything.

DAWN found him still awake but the eye had disappeared. Unbolting the kitchen door he pumped a fresh drink of water from the well and stood scowling at the weed-grown acres off which his father had made a living. And where was his father? Dead of overwork at fifty-three. At least that would never happen to him.

Glancing toward the cow barn he more sensed than saw the shadow cast briefly on the barnyard by the rising sun. Then the shadow appeared again, this time distinctly. It was the shadow of a crooked-back old man holding a grain scythe in one hand. His beard was at least waist long. He appeared to be holding one hand to his forehead as if shielding his eyes from the sun.

HIS mouth gone suddenly dry, innumerable cartoon caricatures of Death recalled themselves to Maddox's fevered mind.

The eye was an agent of Death. And Death had followed him to the farm. Death was waiting with his scythe to cut him down.

He turned to flee back inside the house in panic and realized he was being absurd. If there was anyone in the barn with a scythe it was a tramp. Death was as intangible as life and only solid bodies threw shadows. His recent fear turned to anger. Someone was making a fool of him, someone who had slept in his barn.

Slipping into his shoes and carrying his gun in his hand he breasted the weed-grown lane to the barn, grimly amused by the fact the shadow had disappeared before he reached the doorway.

"You, in there," he called. "Come out!"

Except for the twittering of the sparrows in the gables, muted by the barn floor proper, the silence was profound. Peering in through the lower center door opening on the lane between the cow-ties and the horse stalls, Maddox called again, this time not quite so certain of himself.

"You in there. I said, come out!"

The barn was in much worse repair than the house. Wind had ripped half the shingles from the roof. The big sliding door hung drunkenly on its track. The whole smelled of ancient manure, dry rot, and molded hay.

Maddox wet his dry lips nervously. Perhaps the shadow of the old man he had seen was a product of the same source as the eye —his mind. In that case it could be Death. Perhaps he shouldn't have come back to the farm. Perhaps he should have taken a chance and gone to El Paso and Juarez.

He realized he had taken a half-dozen steps inside the cool dimness of the barn and began a cautious retreat only to stop staring with bulging eyes at a dozen tiny objects

lying atop the polished wooden lid of the grain box.

Unless he was mad he was seeing a dozen tiny dried corpses, miniature human bodies dried into fantastic shapes like so much cord wood. Someone in the barn screamed and Maddox realized it was his own voice he heard ringing in his ears. Almost without conscious volition he stretched out his left hand toward one of the tiny bodies and a thin, piping, voice ordered:

"No. Those don't belong to you. They're mine!"

Whirling, he saw the man or object that had cast the shadow he had seen. Standing at the far end of the dim corridor, where the fallen silo had formerly stood, he was still clutching the grain scythe in one hand. A dingy white gown fell to his ankles. His head was bald and pink. A long white beard curled to his waist. One sunken eye socket was empty but the faded blue eye in the other socket blazed in anger.

"Don't you touch those," he repeated. "They're mine. And they are worth their weight in gold. Charlie told me so!"

Lifting the scythe he took a half-dozen quick steps forward and retreating in panic Maddox emptied his gun into the thing. A red spot, and then another and another appeared on the dingy white gown. The old man dropped his scythe, clawed at his beard, and fell forward in the dust.

"I've killed Death. Now I'm immortal," Maddox gloated madly. Then sanity asserted itself slowly. Death wouldn't bleed and the man on the floor was bleeding. Great pools were spreading out from under his body and soaking the white beard red.

Forcing himself to the task, Maddox felt the body. It was flesh and blood. The thing he had killed was a man. He had added a fresh murder to his string. The gown that had so impressed him was nothing but an old-fashioned nightshirt. He found his other clothes, a blue shirt and overalls in a box stall. Some old tramp had been sleeping in his barn—and he had killed him.

Sheriff Convers' words came back. "*You may not be quite as alone as you think.*"

Convers had known about the tramp. He had known he was sleeping in the barn and the knowledge had amused him. Sweat started on Maddox's cheeks. This was murder. Once it was known that the old tramp

was dead he would be arrested and thrown into prison. He would never reach Juarez. He would never spend the money he had killed for. His over-taut nerves tightened to the point of tears. It wasn't fair. This couldn't happen to him. He wouldn't allow it to happen. He wouldn't allow a fluke to upset his well-laid plans.

FORGETTING the tiny dried corpses in his haste he hurried back to the house and dressed. The thing for him to do was to dispose of the body. The bog. That was the place for it. He would dispose of the body in the bog, clean up the mess in the barn, and if Convers inquired of the old tramp he would say he had gone away. He had no business sleeping in his barn in the first place. Maddox felt a glow of virtuous anger. It was trespassing.

He found a rusted shovel in back of the barn, also the purpose of the scythe. The white-bearded old man had been cutting weeds, obviously preparatory to planting a small garden. Maddox was indignant. He'd had a right to shoot him. Now that his father was dead this was his farm. His anger faded into a sense of futility. But he still had to dispose of the body. He couldn't afford an investigation. He couldn't afford to have anyone but himself see the eye.

He turned to see if it was watching him. It was, from between one of the stanchions. Sullenly he climbed the stairs to the barn floor proper, found a smelly old horse blanket folded on the seat of a spring wagon and returning to the lower level attempted to wrap the body in it. The body was too long for the blanket. If he attempted to cover the bare feet the pink, bald head, the single staring eye and the long white beard hung out. He compared the old man's single eye to the one hovering between the stanchion. There was no similarity. The dead man's eye was merely an eye. The other was a malignant, familiar, personality, an eye he had known before. More, it seemed at home in the barn.

By stuffing the dead man's feet and legs in a grain sack he managed finally to cover the body and lifting it to his shoulder began the long walk to the wood lot and the bog. The rising spring sun was warm, the rough blanket chafed his neck. By the time he reached his destination his own body was

drenched in sweat. It was the hardest work he had done in years.

Laying the body under a tree on the edge of the bog he began to dig a grave. The soil was soft but spongy. It seemed to fight the rusted shovel. Water seeped into the grave. It was late morning by the time he had dug a hole large enough to receive the body. He dumped it in unceremoniously and the pink bald head and long white beard popped out of the blanket. Cursing in a frenzy of fear, Maddox filled in the hole and had to remove some of the dirt to stuff in the shoes and shirt and overalls that he had found in the box stall. It was the little things that sent a man to prison and he wanted to be free to spend his money.

The grave filled in it began to rain. For that much Maddox was grateful. It felt good on his fevered body. And the rain would blot out all trace of his digging.

"What old man?" he would ask if Sheriff Convers questioned him. "I didn't see any old man."

He had nothing more to fear from the old man. His body would never be found. But there was still the mess in the barn to clean up. He sloshed wearily back to the barn, the accusing eye dancing from rain drop to drop before him. There was more blood on the floor than he had thought. More, it had sunk into the porous cement. He solved his problem by sprinkling dust on top of the blood and fresh chaff on top of the dust. Satisfied, at last, he returned to the house for a drink and was surprised to find it was noon. He should be hungry but he wasn't.

Sitting at the kitchen table he drank his lunch instead. Damn the cashier. Damn the white-bearded old man. He hadn't wanted to kill either of them. The bottle half-emptyed, he was pleasantly surprised to discover that the eye had disappeared. Perhaps it was gone for good. He hoped so. He'd look like hell strolling down the Paseo de la Reforma with a chic Mexican bimb on one arm and a bloody eye floating a half foot from his head.

The bottle emptied, he was in a maudlin good humor. All he had to do was sit tight for another week or so and he could be on his way again. Then he thought of something that he had forgotten in his haste to dispose of the old man's body and his whisky good humor left him.

Had he imagined, or had there really been several dozen tiny corpses on the polished lid of the grain box?

HE CLOSED his eyes and saw them again distinctly imprinted on the inside of his lids. They were grotesque, contorted, bodies but distinctly the likenesses of men. But had he seen them, or had he merely imagined them as he imagined the eye?

He had to know and lurched through the rain to the barn. The lid of the grain box was bare but he hadn't imagined the dried miniature corpses. Less than three inches long they had left their imprint in the dust, like a child making an "angel" in the snow. The short hairs on the back of his neck tingling, Maddox returned to the house and opened a fresh bottle of whiskey.

It failed to quiet his nerves or stupify him. A wind had risen and the old farmhouse creaked and groaned as it was buffeted. Somewhere overhead a shutter banged noisily and more and more for want of something to do than because he cared, Maddox climbed the stairs to the second floor and found the loose shutter in the tiny room over the kitchen that had been his bedroom.

A pair of home-made skis still stood in the corner by the chimney. His books were still in the packing-box bookcase, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Tom Swift and His Aeroplane*, *From Rags to Riches*, *Tony the Shoe Shine Boy*, a well-thumbed paper-backed copy of *Jack the Giant Killer*.

Amused, he took the paper-backed book from the case. His name was Jack all right. And while he hadn't killed any giants he sure as hell had killed the fat cashier and the old man with the white beard.

He started to thumb through the pages, stopped, annoyed, as the shutter banged again. Perhaps he could nail it shut. He opened the window to see and caught a flash of movement in the doorway of the barn. His skin crawled over his raw nerve ends.

Someone was in the barn, perhaps scraping the chaff aside to discover the blood on the floor. His heart pounding he raced down the stairs and out of the house toward the barn, keeping his gun in his pocket on the off chance it should be Sheriff Convers. But it couldn't be the sheriff. There was no car but his own in the yard.

The middle corridor was gray with rain

and late afternoon but he hadn't been mistaken. There was someone in the barn. He could hear them moving around in the box stall. He tiptoed a few feet inside the barn, opened his mouth to call and froze in horror as the old man he had killed and buried emerged from the box stall shaking his head and long white beard from side to side as if in pain or puzzled.

As Maddox watched him he climbed the stairs to the barn floor proper and disappeared into the gloom. The blood in his veins turned to ice, Maddox followed almost without conscious volition.

Still shaking his head from side to side, the old man was looking in the dark corners of the barn for something or someone. Not finding what he sought he limped out the open sagging door and down the earth ramp.

Screaming with terror, unable to control himself any longer, Maddox wrenched the gun from his pocket and emptied it after the old man's back.

"Die, damn you. Die. You're dead. I killed you!"

The old man neither stopped nor gave any indication he had heard him and reloading his gun with the last of his loose shells, Maddox followed him down the ramp. He couldn't let him get away, get to the sheriff.

AT THE head of the lane the old man halted as if perplexed then limped on toward the wood lot raising his voice from time to time in a shrill inarticulate cry that tore Maddox's already raw nerves to tatters.

Then Maddox realized the eye was with him again, seemingly sardonically amused by the situation.

"Stop, damn you. Stop!" Maddox screamed.

The old man continued to trudge through the rain without even turning his head. Now he was peering from side to side, pausing now and then to look under a clump of unusually heavy underbrush.

"He's looking for his body," Maddox thought. "He isn't alive. He's dead. It's only his spirit I see. He's looking for his mortal shell."

He wondered what would happen if he found it. He kept a more respectful distance between them, afraid now of being discovered. His gun would do him little good against a spirit.

The old man "cawed" again. It was as close as Maddox could identify the sound. He wondered if he was mad and imagined all of this. The slosh of the mud and the could rain trickling down his neck told him better.

On the edge of the bog the old man stopped under a tree and tossing something in his palm regarded the bog thoughtfully.

Maddox wanted to scream, "Your grave's to the left, you fool, less than fifty feet from where you're standing. Why don't you get back into it again?" He realized he was screaming it but the old man paid no attention to him. Then, through the growing twilight, Maddox realized what the dead man was tossing on his palm. It was one of the miniature dried corpses the old man had claimed that someone he called "Charlie" said were worth their weight in gold. To whom? The devil?

Maddox's teeth chattered with both fear and cold. He wished he was in Juarez, anywhere but where he was. Then the old man turned and saw him. It was too dark by now for Maddox to see clearly but he could feel the dead man's eye hot on his face. Now he was striding toward him uttering the inarticulate "caw," pointing a bony finger.

Completely cowered, Maddox turned and ran.

Underbrush caught at his knees and sent him sprawling in the sodden leaf mold. He clawed his way to his feet and ran on, the unblinking, bloody, eye bobbing on before him, the white-bearded dead man hobbling close at his heels, cawing for him to stop.

Panting, sobbing for breath, Maddox reached the house a few hundred feet in the lead and snatching the money-stuffed typewriter case from under the leather couch, threw it in the back seat of his car and ground savagely on the starter.

To hell with the danger of being stopped by the county or state police. He was heading straight for El Paso. If he got there—fine. If not, anything, even prison or electrocution was preferable to the madhouse that had been his father's barn.

The motor caught and sputtered out, the driving rain having wet the ignition. Maddox ground on the starter again and this time there was no response.

The old man loomed larger through the rain, still cawing his hoarse order to stop.

his white beard trailing over his shoulder in his haste. Now, almost to the car, he shouted a sentence in some weird and unknown, to Maddox, tongue. It sounded to Maddox as if he was demanding to know what had become of his eye.

In blind panic, Maddox caught up the typewriter case, opened the door of the car and fled down the sand road to the highway the dead man hobbling along behind him. Where the road made juncture with the highway, Maddox, no longer knowing what he was doing, snatched his gun from his pocket again and blazed the last of his shells in the general direction of his pursuer.

The shots slowed the dead man this time but failed to stop him. Instead they seemed to make him more determined. Shaking his bony fists in anger he mouthed something that sounded something like a curse and increased the speed of his limp.

Maddox was winded before he had gone a mile. So was his pursuer but both men stumbled on, Maddox with the strength of desperation. He felt if the old man should lay one of his cold clammy hands on him the top of his head would explode.

MILE after mile they stumbled on. Now the old man almost had him. Now Maddox pulled slowly away only to trip on a wind blown branch and lose his hard won gain. They were a hundred feet apart when Maddox stumbled past the sign that announced the Perry Village limits.

There were more cars at the curb than there had been the night before but Maddox limped on past them toward the lights of Sheriff Convers' store.

There were three farmers in the store. The sheriff was weighing out five pounds of sugar for one of them when Maddox, his clothes sodden with rain and mud, staggered into the store and laying the typewriter case on the counter whimpered:

"It's in there, all of it. Forty-eight thousand dollars. And every penny of it is yours if you protect me from the old man. He wants to take me back to his grave with him and I don't want to go. I didn't mean to kill him. I didn't want to kill him. All I saw was his face over the stall and I thought he was the eye."

Convers gaped at him open-mouthed.

Tears were streaming down Maddox's fear contorted face and from time to time he glanced nervously over his shoulder. Then the white-bearded old man opened the door of the store, screamed something in his unknown tongue about his eye and fear and fatigue and whiskey and the heat of the now lighted hot blast stove cut Maddox's legs from under him. He screamed, "Go away. You're dead. I killed you and buried you in the bog!" then fainted across the counter.

Maddox came to seated in a chair by the stove, a hard, cold substance joining his wrists together. The first thing he saw was the old man and he stared at him incredulous. The old man had two eyes, and the old man he had killed had only one.

Then his head rocked in pain as Sheriff Convers slapped him smartly. "Why you crazy young fool," he roared. "Why did you kill old Hi? The old coot never did a harm to anyone."

The old man said something in his strange tongue and Convers listened intently. "You say you left Hi cutting weeds this morning, eh," he translated and Maddox realized with a sick sinking of his stomach that the old man's white beard concealed a hair lip and that was what made him sound so strange.

Shaking with anger, the old man cawed on. Returning to pick up his merchandise and make a trip to town he had found his brother gone and had looked for him in vain only to see the prisoner looking at him strangely. Meaning to question him as to whether he had seen Hi, Maddox had turned and fled. Suspicious then, he had followed him only to be fired upon.

Convers wrote something on a pad and, even sicker, Maddox realized that the old man was deaf. That was why he hadn't heard him call or paid any attention to the first burst of shots that had missed him. "Don't listen to him," he screamed, "And I take back what I said. I never killed anyone. I was just out of my mind with fear." He pointed an accusing finger at the white-bearded man. "He's the killer. He has dozens of shrunken, miniature, corpses in his pocket. He told his brother they were worth their weight in gold."

One of the farmers said, "What the hell!"

Convers looked puzzled, then plunged a big fist into one of the old man's jumper pockets and pulled out a handful of the dried tiny bodies that had terrified Maddox. "You mean these ginseng roots?" he demanded. "Why you dumb fool. Of course they are worth their weight in gold. And the more nearly like the human body they are the more the Chinese will pay for them. That's what the words mean in their language, 'likeness of man'. They use it as a medicine and that was Charlie and Hi's business. They're ginseng hunters and quite a bit of it grows wild on the bog that adjoins your father's farm."

Maddox cowered in his chair, saying nothing, his agile mind freed of fear attempting to find a loophole in the net he had drawn around himself. But he was too deeply entangled.

"We'd best get a posse together and search the farm," Convers said. "For the life of me I can't see why Maddox here would want to kill a harmless old coot like that."

Then he opened the typewriter case and whistled.

"Forty-eight thousand," he said. "And he wasn't whoofing."

One of the farmers looked at the money, then at Maddox. "Forty-eight thousand," he repeated. "Isn't that about the sum that bank just over the state line was stuck up for three four days ago? Sure it was. I heard it on a newscast."

Maddox didn't like the way that Sheriff Convers looked at him.

"Yeah. Sure it was," the sheriff said slowly. "The stickup in which a cashier was killed."

Maddox averting his eyes looked down at the floor and the bloody, malignant, eye scowled back up at him. In fury he got to his feet and attempted to stomp it into the nothing that it was when he realized this time it was only the colored picture of an eye. Automatically he stooped and picked it from the floor. It was the front piece of the paper backed book he had been looking at in his room when he had seen the movement in the barn.

Small wonder the eye had been familiar. It was the bloody one eye of the giant that Jack had killed, and that had so terrified him as a boy.

His subconscious mind groping back had pictured the wound on the cashier's forehead as the eye and it had been with him every since. But he doubted very much if it would bother him much longer. He would never see Juarez. He would never spend the money. He wouldn't even be prosecuted for the murder of the old ginseng hunter. There was no capital punishment in Michigan but there was in Illinois and Sheriff Convers was already on the phone.

"Get me Fairview, Illinois," he was telling the operator. "No. The Sheriff's office. I have someone whom I think he wants."

In real life, Maddox thought grimly, Jack hadn't killed the giant but the giant had certainly done for Jack.



The Story Tellers' Circle

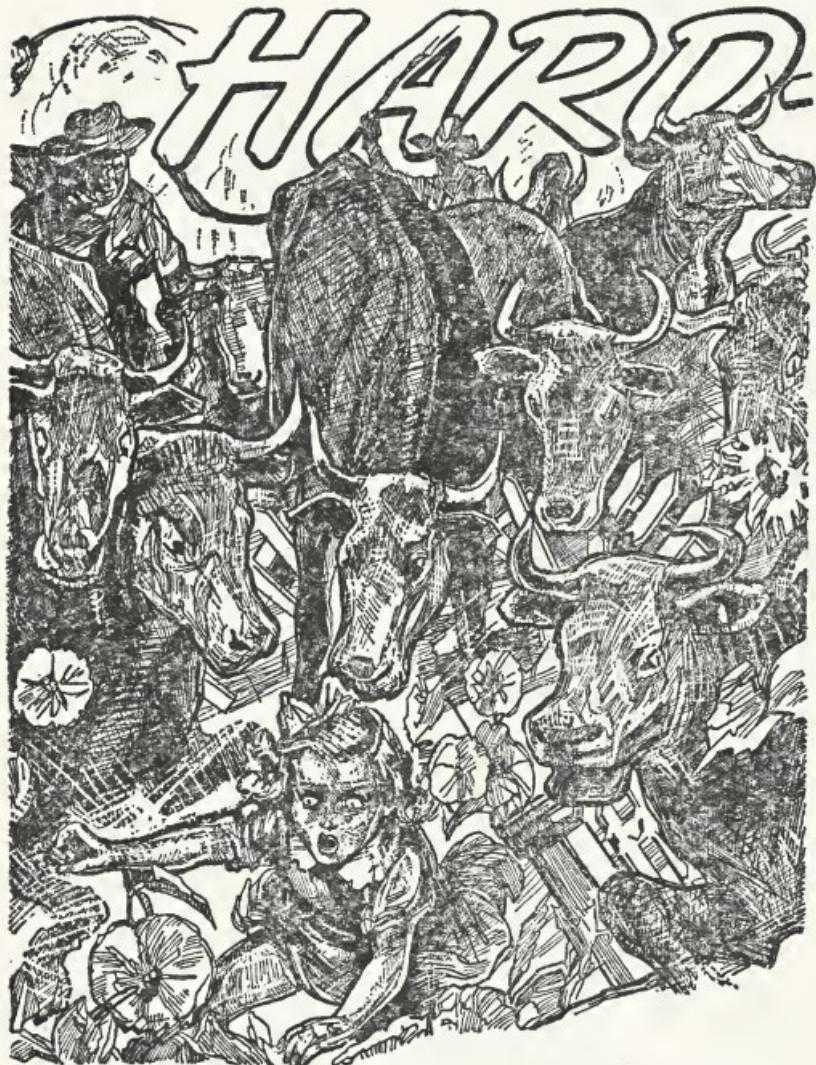


We Examine a Toad

H. S. M. KEMP, our very good friend from Saskatchewan, is the kind of author this department favors. He's been just about all the places and done most of the things his good yarns tell about. And—which is the nicest of all for the editor who

tries to keep the Story Tellers' fires burning in this Corner—he's not backward (which is a polite word for lazy) about writing down the various odds and ends that may actually build the story itself or inspire it.

Which helps us more than a little to dig up interesting lines like these of Mr. Kemp's
(Continued on page 142)



By GORDON RAY YOUNG

Author of "Crooked Shadows," etc.

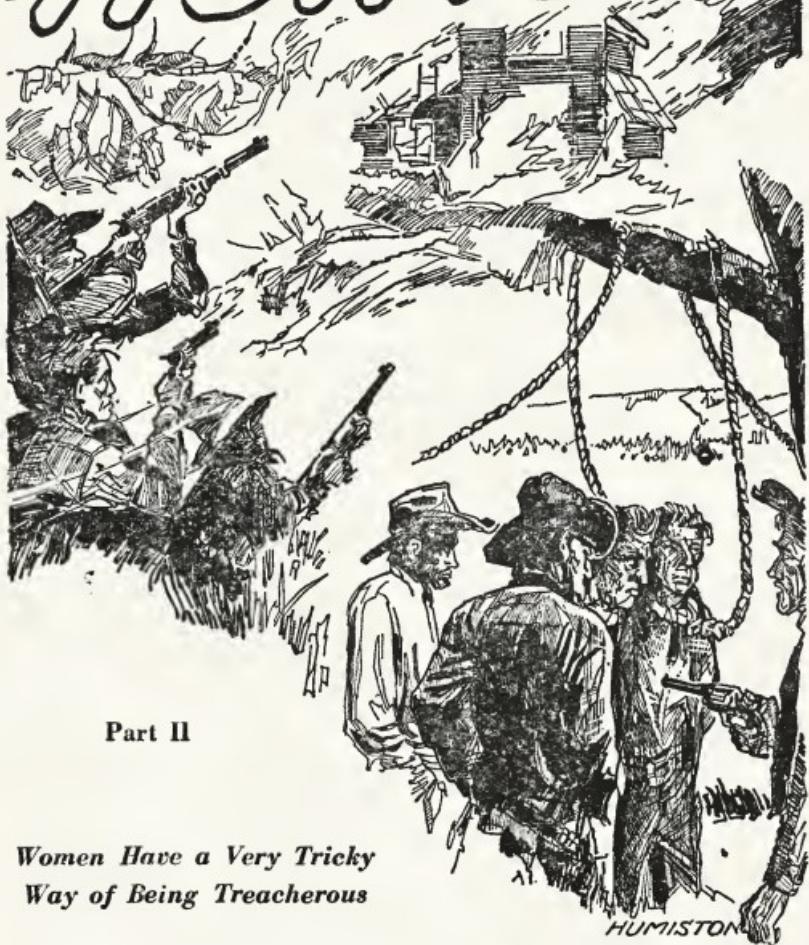
THE STORY SO FAR

ARIZONA soon after The War—Northern cattle interests represented by Colonel Arnold, whose attitude towards the

Southern Bevarts, Claytons, etc., is one of contempt.

Jack Rodiker, a rider, is accused of killing Craig Arnold and Arnold's widow swears she saw him do it. Rodiker takes to the

HUNTED!



Part II

*Women Have a Very Tricky
Way of Being Treacherous*

HUMISTON

outlaw trail, and while rewards pile up for him, is never captured.

Later he comes back, since he has heard that Cora Arnold has returned from the East and his avowed purpose is to make her admit her testimony about the murder was false. He thinks no one will recognize him, and finds that the reputation he has had wished on him leads Jerym Bevarts to make him a

proposition about robbing the Bevarts' bank to cover up Jerym's defalcations. Rodiker makes Bevarts put his offer in writing, and immediately an attempt is made to murder him. Then he meets Yank Arnold's daughter, back from school in the East, and she, having been told he is an Arnold hand, asks him to drive her out to the Arnold spread. But she is puzzled. He has given the name

Jackson, said he was a stranger in Santander, yet he seemed to know a lot of the Arnold background.

VII

LOAFERS in the half-darkness of the hotel porch watched Rodiker come down the dim-dust-soft street with a pole buggy and his own saddle horse jogging behind on a lead rope.

Presently Slim Clayton, deep in the shadows, gawked to see Rodiker follow Kate out of the hotel with valises that he stowed in the back of the buggy before he cramped the wheels and helped her on the step.

Rodiker then put down the buggy top. Kate asked him to. She wanted a full view of the stars and night-blackened hills, and the great sweeps of dark flat land where the yuccas held up their clusters of white flame; and she wanted to feel the warm breath of the sweat wind as they drove toward her home.

When the team trotted off with whimpering creak of harness, Slim came out of the shadows to head for the bar, feeling the need of likker to help him guess at what Rodiker was up to in going off with Yank Arnold's girl.

Jerym Bevarts' big pale hand reached out and closed on Slim's arm. "I want you!" said Old Jerym with the look and sound of the devil laying hold on somebody he had the right to claim, body and soul.

The team went at their own speed, could walk or trot as pleased them, while Rodiker, looking straight ahead, sat with a stiff back, a rein in each hand, a hand on each knee, rather as if he didn't know much about driving but wanted to make sure the horses wouldn't bolt.

A thin lap robe lay over Kate's knees. She was merry as if at a picnic, and had taken off her hat, tilting her face to the sky, and chattered like a magpie. He liked the lilting chatter.

She couldn't imagine, she said, why the colonel, or some of the ranch folks hadn't met her, but there wasn't any worry in her wonder. "I'm going home!" she chanted rejoicingly.

When a coyote began yip-yapping—one yip sounding close and the next far away,

as if the fellow tried to make believe he was three or four—she said, "He's telling that I've come!"

Soon the moon began to rise and made the night brilliant. With her face to the sky she said "See how close the stars are? That means heaven's ever so much nearer to you out here than Back East!"

She moved a foot and it struck the barrel of the rifle lying on the floorboard, and that reminded her of why it was there; so she raised herself up and looked back over the folded-down buggy top.

"I'm not afraid, but do you think they'll follow?"

"To follow, they'd be seen. If they can't dry gulch a man, they'll let him be."

Uneasiness tingled through her, but she assured herself that it wasn't fear. *I'm just excited*, she thought; and said, "How the country's changed! When I was little the colonel let me ride where I pleased. He said nobody would hurt a girl, however much they had it in for the girl's father. When I was little, even Jack Rodiker was good to me!"

His eyes stayed straight ahead. "You mean that outlaw?"

"They say he killed my uncle but I don't believe it!"

He droned, "From how I hear, most people do."

"The colonel thinks the Bevartses hired him to. And you can't argue with the colonel!"

Rodiker's face turned toward her. "As I hear tell, some woman saw him do it, didn't she?"

Kate said, "She saw a man she thought was Jack Rodiker. But she didn't know him very well. Didn't know him at all, really. The Fourth of July before there in Moheela we had seen him ride a horse that men bet he couldn't!" Her voice trilled laughingly. "I made the colonel so mad he licked me good when we got home!"

"Whipped you?"

"Larruped me! Indeed, he did!"

"Why'd a man do that?"

"I needed it, that's why!"

"W'y, you was only a little tyke."

"Big enough to coax twenty dollars out of him to buy a dress and things, then I gave it to our cook to bet that Jack Rodiker could ride that horse! He did it easy, too!"

"Ah, 'easy,' hm?"

"Aunt Cora and I stood in a wagon to look over the crowd. The horse was a big devil and trained to throw or kill a rider by falling back. But Jack rode him into a lopé! I had the colonel's glasses and could watch close. When he tried to r'ar back, Jack whipped him down—like this!"

She leaned forward and her hand flew out in a rapid criss-cross, pantomiming the slash of a quirt over the killer's head.

"You knew this Rodiker?"

She laughed out, "Oh, well enough to be desperately jealous of a white trash girl who folks said was his sweetheart!" Kate added merrily, "I bet I was prouder of him that day than Bess Clayton was!"

Rodiker sat remembering. He had known some women looked on, but he hadn't known who they were or cared, excepting that Bess was in the crowd. He'd taken the chance, wanting to make her proud; that more than any other reason had put him in the saddle.

And Kate was wrong; it hadn't been easy. He had topped all sorts of unbroken horses but this was a trained "outlaw," and nearly tireless. Pain had knifed Rodiker's side and his neck seemed broken by the whipcracker back-humping of the big brute. Afterwards Rodiker coughed blood. He had been paid \$10 to make the try and hadn't bet on himself, not having any money. The horse was a killer, just horse hide stretched over the bones of a devil that tried to trample a man when he threw him.

Old Tex Clayton had bet everything but his wooden leg that Rodiker could ride the horse—any damn' horse! After the ride, Tex whopped and hollered, and proudly shoved \$20 of his winnings into Rodiker's hand—later borrowing it back when he'd had too much likker and been horns-woggled.

Kate said, "The colonel doesn't believe in his daughter gambling. Though it was lying to him that brought the lickin'! I wasn't yet half grown, but I thought Jack Rodiker the handsomest boy in the country, having seen him about three times! Spoke to him just once. Pretended my ankle was sprained so I could ask him to bring my horse from the stable. Then I played like I fainted! What a girl won't do!"

"And he?"

"He picked me up off the floor and held me close! And my little heart bobbed like a cork when a fish nibbles! I had fainted so convincingly that he wouldn't let me walk to the stable with him! See how a girl can overplay her hand?"

"I see. And your betting on him made the colonel mad?"

"My betting, not so much. But the lying, yes! He won't stand for lies of any kind from anybody; And of course, he fired poor Bob. The best range cook we ever had! But you'll like the colonel. He looks so stern, with shoulders always just like this—"

KATE threw her shoulders back as stiffly as she could, made a sour face, pulled an imaginary mustache, but said:

"He's really soft-hearted. Honest, he is. Only it makes him mad if he thinks anybody thinks so! He'd rather die than admit, ever, that he's wrong."

The horses plodded at a head-bobbing walk. Other coyotes were yipping now. How many, no knowing; two or three could sound like a wide-ranging pack, and threw their voices to confuse the game they chased. An owl flew across the road, coming to the ground with as heavy a flutter as if thrown.

Rodiker asked, "About your uncle, why didn't you?"

"I did at first. Cora had seen him, she said. I was only thirteen, about. And not very bright. Not like now—after I've been away for years to school! And when the other girls there found that the little savage from Arizona knew Jack Rodiker—I bragged about how he had picked me up when I fainted!—they begged for stories and to read my clippings. I said he never shot my uncle. I'll still say it to anybody but the colonel!"

"You've not said why you think he didn't."

"For one thing, I liked him!" Kate seemed earnest with, "I don't believe I could like anybody that was mean!" Then she laughed. "All women feel that way—which is maybe why we are so easy fooled! But—you'll never make me believe that a man who'd go through mud and rain to fetch a doctor for a child he didn't know—when the child's father was out with the

sheriff hunting him—would shoot anybody in the back!" Then she asked sharply "Would you? Believe it, I mean?"

He didn't say anything but shook the team into a trot, and the road was rough and joggled her about.

The lights of Whitman's lay ahead, just this side of Apache Flat.

A lighted door was wide open, letting moths and winged bugs come in with the fresh air. As soon as the buggy stopped, Kate threw the lap robe aside and jumped out. Her small feet scrunched the gravel as she ran toward the doorway and with a merry squeal announced her escape from the East.

Voces answered welcomingly; and Rodiker heard a deep-throated, "It's my little Kate!" Her small silhouette merged into a big man's encircling arms.

Rodiker meant to keep away from the light here for, though now his appearance was greatly changed, he didn't care to come under the keen eyes and remembrance of an old-timer such as Whitman. He drove on to the water trough and pumped. When the horses had drunk, he uncinched the saddle on his horse, then sat on his heels and smoked. Now he had tobacco and papers stowed in a saddle bag, and in his pocket still some of Zig's makin's.

His thoughts went round and round Kate; and a lingering smile warmed his dark face that she should have pretended a sprained ankle when such a mite of a kid; and he thought how little a man can know of what a woman's up to, big or little.

When Kate stood in the lighted doorway and called, "Mr. Jackson!" he rose up and pulled the uncinched saddle from the horse. "Come here," she said, "and meet old friends of mine!"

"Just a minute, Miss. I've got some fixin' to do on this saddle," he explained, using his prepared excuse to keep out Whitman's lamplight.

Kate then came into the moonlit yard with two men and a woman. The woman was a stout Mexican with long swaying colored skirts and Kate's arm was about her waist. One man was a small wrinkled Mexican, the other a burly fellow.

Kate said, "Nita was nearly like my mama, except she never spanked!"

Rodiker pulled his hat, bowing to Anita. The burly man rumbled, "The times you've needed it, darlin'!"

"And, Mr. Jackson," Kate said gleefully, "this is Bob, the cook I told you of!"

Bob had the girth of a good cook and was more jovial than most. He called Kate a "gamblin' wench!" and told Rodiker, "The men she's tied to a snubbin' post before she was knee-high to a pack rat!"

Rodiker shook hands with the small wrinkled Mexican. Kate explained, "He and Nita came to help look after Mr. Whitman before he passed away last spring. And they are staying on here."

The cook said, "And if you don't mind, Jackson, I'd like to drive the little lady from here on in to the ranch. We're old sweethearts!"

"The colonel hired him back after I went away!"

"Yes, Mister," Bob the cook rumbled. "And I hear you been hired too. Y' see, Zig oncet tried to make love to her, and your punchin' his nose has dealt you aces!"

"He punched three noses, I told you!" Kate corrected. "And it wasn't Zig's trying to make love to me that I minded—it was his not knowing how!"

"He ought to do better at it now since I hear Bess Clayton is learnin' him. And, Darlin', why didn't you let us know you was comin'?"

"I couldn't do more than write, could I? I expected somebody to be at Woodward and nobody was even at Moheela. So I coaxed Mr. Jackson here to drive me out. And," she added to Rodiker, "you are to follow us."

The buggy drove off. Rodiker slowly resaddled. He had lifted the rifle from the buggy's floorboards and replaced it in the boot, and now he dawdled in an argument with himself over his lack of good sense if he went on to the Arnold ranch. There was wariness enough to feel that he would soon be suspected, somehow found out, but the dark-eyed girl made him want to go. The lure of her high-tempered liveliness drew him on, though he wondered doubtfully about how she would feel now if she learned that he was Jack Rodiker, who had once held her in his arms.

He pumped himself a drink and leisurely had another cigarette, thinking of Zig as he

flung the empty sack aside. *The girl I'm going to marry!* Zig had said that, and Bess made no denial.

A smile touched his mouth when he thought of Old Jarym, and he shook his head in recalling the offer of \$2,000. That promise, of course, had been a pure lie. *He'd probably have tried to fool me with washers in canvas bags, and claimed I got away with big thousands.*

VIII

HE SWUNG into the saddle and looked ahead. There wasn't any dark spot wavering on the road that in a mile or so slipped from view at the Flat's downgrade, and he was half-minded not to follow the buggy, but he did, riding slowly at first, then at an easy lope. His incurious glance drifted over the shadow-studded land where sprawling clumps of cactus were fanged as a nest of snakes, where the shaggy yuccas lifted their glowing candlebras and, in some direction, the haze of smoke trees blurred the moon-etched sharpness of the night.

The gun's report was thin and not near. He at once reined up, rising in the stirrups with a listening tenseness as hand dropped to the rifle stock. Right off another shot was fired, then others, and his keenness placed the sound as from dead ahead for the wind was in his face and he heard, or thought he did, a scream that was as faint as a dying echo.

Rodiker pulled the rifle free, put the blunt towels into the horse's flanks and held them there, asking for speed while he leaned low and peered along the road that curved and disappeared as abruptly as if at the end of the world's drop-off. The horse's shod feet beat the dust with about the sound of rapid fists on a wet drum as he rode headlong, not knowing, and for once not caring, what he was getting into.

He swung on the curve of the Flat's sharp downgrade and, as he passed her, Kate's wild cry told him, "They killed Bob—"

What else she tried to say was unheard. He didn't slacken except to swerve aside from the stalled buggy where one horse still struggled in the tangle of harness, and both were down. He straightened with a quick look to right and left and saw three horsemen: They had dodged off the road,

one turning to the left and two to the right, and these two would be circling for the river and he followed them.

As they streaked in and out of the brush-shadows they lashed their horses, and he guessed that the horses were already tired by the long fast roundabout ride from town. His own horse was fresh and he gained.

One of the fellows rocked back in his saddle and fired.

Rodiker's was a grim contempt; firing a revolver from a running horse at a horseman nearly two hundred yards away was about like throwing rocks at a bat. But the man fired three times and not a bullet came near enough to whistle.

Rodiker leaned forward, giving his horse a loose rein and pressed in the spurs, again asking for speed. He got it, bound on bound, closing in; and when the man again leveled out his revolver behind him, as if desperately sighting, Rodiker swung up the rifle, fired, and the fellow lurched sidewise and backwards, falling head-down and lay on his back.

In galloping by, Rodiker leaned low but he couldn't see well enough to recognize the fellow, even if he had known him; and he didn't pause, meaning to kill the other man who had veered sharply and was now flogging his horse. The horse was very tired.

Rodiker rode hard, gaining fast, and soon pitched up his rifle, lowered it, then peered, frowningly. He muttered, "It can't be!" and drove in the spurs.

The man was circling a wide patch of brush. Rodiker didn't follow him but tried for a short cut by dropping his head to one side of the saddle horn as he crashed into the chaparral, going through with crackle of dried limbs, with lash and tear of thorny branches that beat at him. When he got through he was so near the fleeing horseman that he yelled, "You, Slim!"

Slim pulled up, faced about, raised his arms. He'd lost his hat but his face was still masked with a handkerchief.

Rodiker rammed the rifle into its scabbard and rode up, almost leg to leg, facing Slim; and hell was in his eyes as he reached out and jerked down the handkerchief's triangular fold from his best friend's face. Slim didn't say a word but his eyes begged like a hurt dog's.

Rodiker said, "Even you!"

Then he reached over and pulled Slim's revolver.

Slim choked up and swallowed and gasped, "I ain't fired!"

Rodiker lifted the barrel to his nose, sniffed, and replaced the gun in Slim's holster. After that he slowly drew back his hand and slapped Slim across the face as hard as he could:

"I'd have believed it of my own brother as quick!"

Slim's words came with a hurt whimper. "He said you'd throwed in with Yank Arnold! Looked like it—you goin' off with that girl! And I purt' near have to do what Jerym says. He's got a holt on me!"

"I thought friendship had a hold on you!"

"Hones, I—"

"I felt I owed you more than I could ever pay, but now you're paid, you Judas. Go on, get back to town and tell that I'm Jack Rodiker, then join up to hunt me down!"

Slim pleaded, "I won't tell. Fore God, I won't, ever! An' Jerym himself don't want it made known that you're back. He made me come with him and Pete. 'Twas Pete you shot back there. Jerym hisself killed that man in the buggy before he knew it wasn't you! Then him and Pete shot the horses 'cause that girl grabbed the lines to drive on fast and—and—"

"Keep on! Talk fast!"

"—then he made out like one of us was *you* and layin' for Yank Arnold, pretendin' to think 'twas him bringin' his girl home!"

JERYM had worn a mask and a duster, fully concealing himself. The horses' brads were daubed over with wet clay that dried. Slim said that Mark hadn't come because his back was hurt too bad for riding after Rodiker threw him heels-over-head to the barroom floor. And Zig—Zig had got out of town.

But Jerym had brought Slim; and now Slim nervously tried to sound proud in saying "I made him promise nobody would be hurt, b-b-but he lied an'—"

"And did he promise, too, that *you* could have the reward for catching me?"

Slim mumbled and moved a hand, pleadingly. Rodiker reined back.

"Get the hell away from me and stay away! Next time we meet, I'll kill you!"

And tell old Jerym I've more than half a mind to join up with Yank Arnold and ruin all the Bevartses in the Santsander! He'll know what I mean! At least Yank Arnold never pretended to be a friend!"

Rodiker turned his horse and rode away with the feeling of having seen worse than death come to the one he had always thought was a friend who could never be distrusted.

When he rode back through the snow-white moonlight to the buggy, he led a horse with a dead man roped across the dead man's saddle.

Kate came from beside the buggy, not crying now but with the smear of tears on her face. He stepped from the saddle and stood beside her. Her dark eyes looked up steadily when he asked if she had any idea who the men were; she didn't speak at first, but her voice wasn't steady when she said: "They all wore masks and one was—was Jack Rodiker!"

"Masked, you knew him?"

"No, not that. But the big man who shot Bob rode close the buggy and he called out, 'Rodiker, this is not Yank Arnold!'"

"And what did Rodiker say?"

"Why, nothing. And how could he have thought my father would be with me?"

Rodiker's slow voice droned. "Rodiker was masked to keep from being known, yet didn't say anything when his name was given away?" Her eyes stared blankly when he asked, "How do you figure that?"

"I don't know," she said wearily. "I just can't think. Poor Bob! No warning at all—they just shot him!"

"Then Rodiker and his bunch cut and run when they heard a lone horseman coming! That outlaw you've been braggin' about once holding you in his arms don't appear to be so much man after all!"

Kate leaned against him as one in weariness leans against a post and said in a small discouraged voice, "Oh, he's as measly-mean as the colonel says he is!"

Rodiker angrily told her, "Come here with me."

He pulled the rope's slip knot from the dead man on the saddle, letting the body flop heavily to the ground, and said, "Bend down and look. Do you know this one?"

She didn't want to look, but came nearer, peeringly stooped, then shook her head. "I have been away so long."

"This is one of the Bevarts' men I had trouble with in town."

Kate lifted her face. "The Bevartses and Rodiker are friends. The colonel always said they hired him to kill Uncle Craig."

He felt like shaking her and said, "Haven't you a lick of sense? They never thought it was the colonel with you. They saw us leave together and rode from town to cut off the buggy. They killed the cook, thinking he was me."

She gazed staringly, with mouth O-shaped and noiseless until she got her breath; then asked, "Why would Jack Rodiker want to kill you?"

And he, exasperated and reckless, said "Because I know him! Windbag and coward! Shoots from the dark and runs—like to-night! He knows I know him!"

She gasped, "You—you know him?"

Rodiker walked away from her, not replying.

The horses lay in a tangle of harness on the road. The cook's frightened horse had broken from the lead rope and run. The cook was slumped forward, knees-down, on the buggy floor. His hat had fallen off and his head hung over the dashboard. A nearly full moon made the land bright as early morning.

Rodiker picked up the laprobe from the dust, shook it well, then spread it over Bob the cook with an unhurrying gentleness; and after that he said:

"Whitman's closer but we're going on. These saddle horses might kick the buggy to pieces if I tried to put harness on them. Anyway, the harness is broken. We'll leave things just as they are."

Somberly, and without another word, he simply took Kate into his arms and lifted her to the dead man's saddle. She was surprised at the way he held and lifted her, yet she didn't flinch and wasn't startled, but liked the strength and possessive gentleness with which he raised her high in the air.

The saddle seat was much too wide, the stirrup leather hadn't notches to bring the stirrup to her feet. She put her feet between the leather. The long skirts were rumpled high above her knees, and she pushed at the skirts but couldn't do anything about the way they hiked up, so she let them be and told him quietly, "I never rode astride

in all my life. The colonel wouldn't let me. It wasn't lady-like."

A mile later she said, "So he is back in the Santsander. And he is a friend of the Bevartses. After you thrashed Zig, they got him to lay for you—just as they did for Uncle Craig."

He said, "You are a fool!" and wouldn't answer when she tried questions as to why he had said it.

IX

THEY rode on to the house, passing through the lace-like shadows of the wide palo verde before the long adobe; and some of the dogs leaped stirrup-high with friendliness toward Kate, but some kept up their yapping and wouldn't quiet down at the sound of her voice.

A big dark figure lumbered out on the balcony overhead and with the manner and voice of swearing at them, demanded, "What's yuhal want?"

Kate's pale uplifted face glowed in the moonlight.

"Oh, Sam!"

The big Negro's, "Who's 'at?" was a startled shout, and the breath seemed knocked out of him as he leaned low on the balcony to peer. "Miss Kate—home?" sounded as if unsure of whether or not he was dreaming. Certainty came with "B'ess mah soul!" He whooped at the dogs, calling them weird names for not knowing their mistress; and he told her the colonel sure had been poorly, but would come downstairs right away, then disappeared.

Kate's feet weren't steady. Rodiker held her arm and the dogs crowded about, pawingly. The heavy door was unfastened and opened into an unlighted hall. As they went in some of the dogs charged by them and scrambled through the hall and on up the stairs.

When there was a hard clack of heels and jangle of spurs on the stairs, Kate said in a hushed tone, "That's papa!" His long shadow fell grotesquely far ahead of him for Sam followed with a candle in a shell-shaped silver reflector.

Sam was big and fat and glisteningly black, and he grinned like a candle-lit pumpkin as Kate flung her arms about the colonel who said, "Kate!" and embraced her tensely.

Rodiker had seen the famous Col. Arnold on the streets of Moheela, and now perceived that he had aged greatly; the bridge of his thin nose was thinner, his nose longer and sharper and his eyes more sunken; the long hair had much grey in it, his mustache and chin whiskers, too. A tall man, thin and straight-shouldered; he didn't appear well. Dressing hurriedly, he had drawn on pants over his nightgown and stamped into boots.

After he looked searchingly into Kate's face, he said, "You have been crying!" and gave Rodiker such a glance as seemed to accuse him.

Rodiker couldn't afterwards recall just what had been said first, what next, but after Kate had leaned against her father with both arms to his neck and told how Bob had been killed, he asked abruptly, "Why are you home?" and sounded reproachful.

Kate looked toward Sam and the big Negro, from behind the colonel's back, wagged a desperate pantomime of protest; so she replied, "I wanted to come!"

Col. Arnold surprised her with, "I wanted you home but wouldn't ask you to come, thinking you wanted to stay."

She rose to tiptoes and held to him. "Papa, I hated it there, but pretended not to, wanting to please you! But I'll never be a lady—not a real one! And I so wanted to come home!"

"Why didn't you write?"

She had written, she said; of course, she had written; and why he hadn't received the letter she couldn't imagine.

He said, "Your Aunt Cora's letters come. She is coming herself next week."

Sam had placed the candle on a stand and put a match to a big-bellied lamp with a round wick. He shook the lamp, judging the amount of oil in it, then replaced the chimney. After that he rolled his eyes as he made low moan over Bob and mumbled maledictions at the Bevartses, all with a ritualistic persistence in a guttural rumble soft as distant thunder.

THETHE colonel paid no attention to the muttering and turned on Rodiker, who looked more of a hard case than ever; in the headlong ride through chaparral branches had lashed him like whips and torn his new shirt to rags.

"So they think you are working for me?"

"That's what the marshal says Zig Bevarts told him."

The colonel stepped closer and stood with feet together, shoulders stiffly straight, head up, and Rodiker noticed that he was breathing hard:

"And you know Jack Rodiker?"

No denying it now, not here with Kate's dark eyes on his face; and the wish that he had kept his mouth shut was useless, so he said, "Yes, I've seen him."

The colonel's deep eyes held a piercing focus in the studying silence before he said "Jackson, when I hire a man I don't ask questions. Soon as he hits the saddle, I know if he knows his work. As long as he does his work, he is my man. If you want to be, you are working for me!"

The queerness of it twitched Rodiker's lips into a vague smile, but he didn't say yes or no; and when the colonel told him, "Think it over!" and moved aside, Rodiker's glance drifted, found Kate and paused.

Her lips were parted, fingers lightly touched her chin, and she stared frozenly in asking:

"Where did you ever know Jack Rodiker?"

He hitched his thumbs into his belt, straightened his shoulders, and his thoughts spun, trying for a story that would fit; but the colonel wheeled about, spoke sharply:

"Never you mind! I've offered him work. No questions asked!"

Her "Yes, Papa," was submissive as she lingeringly pulled her eyes from Rodiker's beard-masked face.

A little old man with fuzzy whiskers limped in, and a goodlooking, dark and not old woman was with him.

Kate said, "Why, Johnny Grant!" and almost hugged him. The wizened old soldier introduced his embarrassed wife. Kate and Mrs. Grant, though strangers, exchanged glances like confidants, which, in a way, they were; and presently they started upstairs together to air and make ready Kate's room.

In the dimness of the stairs' landing Kate turned and looked down at Rodiker, now rolling a cigarette. There was a heedfulness in her stare, a kind of questioning amazement but decision, too, as she held her breath, bit her lip and nodded. Her fingers were clenched.

Johnny was one of the colonel's pensioners; he lazed about, being greatly af-

flicted by the ache of old wounds when he didn't want to work. Now he was sent to arouse the bunkhouse.

Sam fetched a lantern. The horse Kate had ridden in was led around to the kitchen pump where Rodiker threw water on the dried clay and rubbed the smear with his hands. The dirt came away and a Lazy S appeared on the horse's shoulder.

Rodiker said, "Enough of a brand blot to serve in the moonlight."

The whites of Sam's rolling eyes glistened as he mumbled. Col. Arnold plucked at his goatee and said nothing until he turned to meet the four men who came from their bunkhouse in a stiff-legged hurry.

Rodiker cleaned his hands under the pump spout, dried them on a handkerchief from his pocket and, listening, soon understood that most the hands were in line camps or working out of Old Place.

The colonel, as stiffly as if speaking with strangers, said to put a team to the buckboard; they would take the Lazy S horse, pick up Bob and the dead Bevarts man from the road, and carry them into Moheela. That was all. No anger, no bitterness, no threats. He merely gave instructions. Rodiker thought, *Don't be feel or can be hide it?*

Old Johnny's dry thin voice rose angrily. "Colonel, they'll lie outa it somehow!"

"They" meant Bevartses, of course; and Col. Arnold's reply was matter-of-fact. "Most likely."

He had Rodiker accompany him into the house and lifted the round-wick'd lamp from the table in the hall, then led the way into a small room that had the look of an office. A desk with stuffed pigeon holes and ledgers was wedged into a corner. A small iron safe, with heavy door half open, stood against the wall.

"Sit down, Jackson."

Rodiker took a straight-backed chair, laid his hat on a knee. Col. Arnold said, "Wait," and left the room. Rodiker rolled a cigarette and, except for the movements of smoking, did not stir. He had much to think about.

When the colonel returned he was dressed for town, having changed from the night-gown to a shirt with a narrow black bow tie at the collar. His wide black hat had a crease through the crown.

He took a bottle and glasses from the shelf, poured without friendliness and

handed Rodiker a filled glass, then downed his own drink as if dutifully taking unpleasant medicine. After that he asked, "Are you working for me, Jackson?"

Rodiker looked at the untasted whiskey in his glass, thought it over, looked up. "What kind of work?"

Col. Arnold's eyes narrowed. They were deep-set, bright and hard as nail heads in a plank. "Your kind!"

Rodiker turned that over and over in his mind, and wasn't sure. "Meaning?"

ARNOLD nodded curtly. "All right, if it will make you feel more comfortable about staying on here, I'll put it into words. You are not a cowhand. You are, I think, on the dodge. Why, I don't care and won't ask because you've got grit in your gizzard!"

Rodiker said, "Thanks."

"Since you've admitted knowing Rodiker, my guess is that you've rode with him but are now at outs."

The way he said it was a kind of question, but Rodiker's eyes didn't move, nor his lips.

Col. Arnold was breathing hard, but not excitedly, as he continued. "Since you are a stranger, you may not know some things. I'll tell you.

"That Lazy S belongs to the Bevartses. They made use of a Lazy S horse some years ago when they hired Rodiker to kill my brother. They never thought that horse would be known—not any more than they did this one tonight.

"Over the years they have crept up from the south and, to crowd me off my range, have put squatters on the water, nesters where my cattle run, and in every way they have schemed to increase the feud that always exists between a cattleman and farmers.

"There's a sheriff now in office who is their friend, but who is also afraid of me. So you may as well say there is no law at all. I want law and order, but there is none now; so from henceforth, sir, I am going to shoot rustlers and hang those I catch! I have no other way to protect myself. And I need such men as you've shown yourself tonight!"

Rodiker drawled tonelessly, "I'm Southern;" which didn't say anything in words that his voice hadn't already revealed.

"I'm not bitter against the South. My

foreman is a Texan. But I am bitter against such copperheads as the Bevarts family, and against such shiftless white trash as the Clays, and the Rodikers, who use the War as an excuse to rob me because I am a Northern soldier!"

Rodiker's fingers tightened about the glass of untasted whiskey as, staringly, he shifted his feet to rise from the chair, meaning to fling the glass and all into Yank Arnold's face and here and now have his quarrel; but the colonel had turned to the door where Sam appeared.

"Dey am ahready, Colonel suh!"

The colonel, walking by Sam, said, "Show Jackson where to bed down." The march of his jangling boots along the hall grew faint. Sam had followed.

Rodiker stood up, slapped on his hat, then splashed the untouched whiskey to the floor and tossed the glass on the table. It bounced, rolled fell to the floor.

Outside there was the sound of horses as men, riding from the stable, passed the house and were followed by the buckboard's rattle. Rodiker meant to leave as soon as they were well away from the house, but Sam hurried back to him.

The satin-black face glistened like wet mahogany when he bulked in the door and looked worriedly at Rodiker. Anger was in Rodiker's brim-shadowed eyes, but Sam wasn't noticing that. He blurted:

"Miss Kate, she want ter see you. See you upstaiks in her room an' dat ain't no right way foh to do!" Then Sam suggested coaxingly, "W'y doan' yuh say you won't come up dar?"

"You needn't have told me."

"I did need too, 'kaze when I done say I won't, she say she'll tell de colonel I had Mist' Johnny's wife write foh her to come home 'kaze the colonel is so mighty poorly. An' ef de colonel know I meddled, he'd hang me up by mah heels ober a slow fire! Miss Kate she make you do what you doan' want ef she do! An' nobody, on'y the colonel hisself, kin make her do what she doan' want!"

"What does she want of me?"

"Foh you ter come. She say a while ergo foh me ter tell you jes' as soon as de colonel he rode for town." The big Negro hurried to explain. "But Mist' Johnny he's drivin' de buckboard, so you an' me is the on'y

men left on the ranch an' it ain't fittin' foh you ter go ter her room, suh!"

Rodiker said, "You're right, and I won't."

Sam's face brightened. "I tol' her you is a gent'mun an' wouldn't! No trick ter know a gent'mun when you've been wid de colonel long as I's been!"

The dogs that followed Sam stirred, and Rodiker, quick to take heed of signs, said, "Who's that?

Kate came out of the shadows looking very small. She had tidied herself a little, straightening her hair and using rice powder. "I thought you wouldn't come, so I did!"

She looked at Rodiker carefully, drew a long breath, then turned. "Sam, go build up a fire and heat some water, and get a good sharp razor. Mr. Jackson wants to shave!"

She didn't smile. Sam gaped with flushed puzzlement.

Kate said, "The colonel often shaves with unheated water, but Mr. Jackson might protest. Go on, git! Or you will be hung up by the heels over that slow fire!" She was pleasant in her threatening but her black eyes seemed to give warning that she meant to be obeyed, however pleasantly she threatened.

WHEN they were alone Rodiker looked at her steadily, and she looked steadily at him, their glances struggling. He knew what she meant by sending the Negro away so they would be alone. For a long time neither moved an eyelid, then Kate leaned toward him a little and whisperingly asked:

"Have I guessed right?"

"Why do you think so?"

She said at once, with swift frankness, "I really didn't think. It came to me suddenly, as if thrown from the dark through a window! I should have known from the first that there is something about you that I ought to have remembered, but it's been years, you know!"

She paused and he said nothing, gave no sign; then she spoke fast, her lips rippling.

"You've changed, but not completely. When you first smiled I should have known. Then you said you were a stranger, but called the Bevartses 'copperheads,' and knew about the colonel being a Yankee. And me! No stranger could have known how I used to say, 'I'm bigger than I look!' But I'm not bright, not really—so I didn't

think. And are you going to shave and let me see, or would you rather admit right out!"

Rodiker's thumbs drifted to his belt, his hands hung there; he studied her dark eyes and shook his head.

"You said that fellow and the Bevartses are friends. I sure as hell am no friend of theirs!"

She answered whisperingly, "I know—know now! But I told you I wasn't very bright, so—won't you trust me?"

A kind of weakness crept inside him, moved about and made him feel like taking her into his arms; but wariness came, and a renewed flush of anger at remembering "Shiftless lazy white trash like the Rodikers, who use the War as an excuse to rob me!"

He told her coldly, "Lady, my name is Jackson."

"No, no!" she said, and caught at him, but he pushed by her without so much as a sidelong look and tramped down the hall, and out of the house.

He rode away, not hurrying.

Sam came with hot water, soap, shaving brush, a razor and its strap.

Kate sat at the desk, her chin resting on the knuckles of a clenched fist.

"You slow poke, you! Too late!" she said and her dark eyes glittered. "I wanted that razor to cut his throat!"

"Wy', whar is he gone, Miss Kate?"

"It took you so long that I couldn't wait and choked him!" She showed a small clenched fist. "Choked and dragged him out and scooped up sand to hide his body! He'll never be seen again, but don't tell anybody! We'll just say he rode off to overtake the colonel!"

Sam, a ponderously fat black worshipper of the ground she walked on, looked at Miss Kate with bewildered gentleness. "Honey, hucome he made you so mad?"

"Why," she said as fiercely as if it were true, "the insolent brute told me I wasn't nearly as pretty as Bess Clayton!"

X

RODIKER headed 'cross country, making **R** for the Santsander where dense willow thickets would be the best hiding place he could find within an easy ride; and he saved his horse by not going fast. No man

was left at the house to follow—but tomorrow? He dreaded the hunt and chase, but felt that it must come: Old Jerym knew, the Claytons, too! also Kate Arnold. And he couldn't go near the Rodiker mountain ranch because pursuers would look there first and watch afterwards.

Many angers stirred within him like teased snakes in a basket; and his flesh burned from the mingled wrath and shame that two women, hand running, had made him feel the fool, and such a fool! Slow riding gave him time for reflection and it rankled to remember how he had returned to Bess and what he had found. Now he knew the Claytons had Judas blood in them and all trust had gone from her promise that she wouldn't tell who he was; she had made that promise when afraid and wanting him to leave. His bitterness toward Slim was the distorting bitterness of a brother's painful hate.

As for Kate, he had known better, which made him an utter fool to accompany her; and she had lured him with pleasantness and teased for his admission that he was Jack Rodiker, which was a woman's tricky way of being treacherous.

He wasn't many miles above the Claytons when he reached the river after daylight. He rode into the shallow water as if heading upstream, then turned down to throw off trailers; and at last came to a narrow brush-covered island-like sandbar. He meant to ride at night, so would spend the day here. Some dread always sipped at his heart when he went into hiding; to sit and wait and watch was more unnerving than to venture recklessly, but he could be patient.

He washed, filled his belly with river water, unsaddled and put a rope on the horse to let him forage on the meager sand grass and willow tips. He stripped off his ragged shirt and put on the other new one. With many cigarettes, and an ever alert listening even when he dozed, Rodiker passed the day, annoyed by heat and gnats.

WHEN the afternoon was nearly gone he had a supper of more river water and cigarettes, then saddled and headed downstream. The river was crooked as a sidewinder's trail and he didn't like leaving tracks along the sandy edge, but it would be tedious to pick his way through thickets.

He rode slowly and watched the twilight deepen. Coyotes began yip-yipping on the mesa above the river bed. "Talking scandal," the Kate girl had said. He couldn't help remembering her with liking, but reasoned that liking was no cause for trusting women, any of them, and thought of Bess.

The stars were out and the darkness was heavy among the clump-shadows, but in the open space of the river's bend a half mile away he saw a rider. He turned aside and stopped where he could watch, then dismounted and put a hand to the muzzle of his horse to prevent a whinny. Soon he heard singing and knew that the rider was a girl astride a bareback horse; and this was a chance to learn if the country was searching for Jack Rodiker. He rode out of the shadows and on into the water as if he had come down to let his horse drink.

The girl checked her singing, but with no uneasiness, and her spurless heels kicked the horse into a canter toward him. She pulled up, saying, "Hello," with a musical questioning tone, and he lifted his head politely, knowing who she was before she said:

"I'm Sue Clayton, but I don't know you. I thought I knew all the good-lookin' fellows hereabouts—leastwise, I want to!" She laughed with the ease of a meadowlark singing. "It's awful hard to catch and hold a beau—you want! We steal 'em from each other, my sister an' me. One sister's gone away, and Bess picks the goshawfulest uns. Not worth stealin'! You new hereabouts?"

Rodiker, hat in hand, stared at her. This kid Sue had been a lanky, awkward, freckled tomboy; now she was big, quail-plump and, in the starlight, pretty but still seemed recklessly tomboyish. It never entered the Clayton girls heads that they should be shy.

Sue rattled on. "The only one of Bess's beaus I ever honestly wanted for myself was Jack Rodiker. You know who he is?"

Rodiker carefully roughened his voice to say, "I've heard."

"I can't get him, so I have to do the next best thing. Are you a stranger, or is it that I just ain't met you before?"

"Pretty much of a stranger." He was thinking bitterly of Slim and Bess, and Claytons as a whole, when he said, "Too bad you can't get him. I hear there's a big reward!"

Sue's was an instant fury. She kicked

the horse up closer as if about to use her fists; her words came as a cat spits when its back is arched and the fur is on end:

"You are weak-minded as a baboon to think us Claytons would think of a reward! We was our friend and is! Will allus be! I've know him since I was big enough to fall outta the cradle! Reward fiddlesticks! We're Texans, us Claytons are! Texans take up for their friends and there ain't money enough in all the Yankee banks to make us not do it!"

He put on his hat. "I didn't mean to rile you, but hasn't there been some talk of him being back in the Santsander?"

"I can't tell what talk there's been! Fool folks talk of ever'thing from why the Lord made the world outa mud to what's the best salve for corns! But he ain't back. I'd know near the first of anybody. He'd come to our house on account of his knowin' we're his friends! More'n that, Mr. Nosey, I play like his own brother is my beau' cause he is sweet and looks like Jack, but is too young for me to be serious!"

Sue neck-reined the horse and clucked, meaning to ride on, but he asked, "I suppose you heard about Yank Arnold's man killing a Bevarts at 'Pache Flat?"

Sue said, "No such thing!" with certainty and impatience. "The Bevartses had nothin' at all to do with the shootin' of that cook, though Old Yank Arnold wants to make out like they did!"

"No?"

"No! The way of it is that one of Arnold's men had a fight in town with Pete Croy. Pete got licked. Then he stole a Bevarts horse and went on the road to lay for this Arnold man who was takin' Miss Snooky Arnold home. She's stuck-up and strait-laced and a mealy-mouthed scardy-cat, with a little pinched nose, and ugly as sin with its face washed! Well, Pete made a mistake and shot the Arnold cook who was in the buggy. Then this Arnold man shot Pete in the back. That's the kind of men Ol' Yank Arnold has workin' for him! What's your name, Mister?"

He gave the first name that came to mind; and Sue told him, "You are sure big and might be goodlookin' if you shaved. I don't like pigs in a poke or men behind a beard!"

She laughed and rode on, and was whistling gaily before she was a hundred feet

away, and he had to think about Slim's treachery to keep from overtaking Sue and gladly telling who he was. She seemed changed in appearance only, being still impulsively frank and quick speaking; and he liked her, but wouldn't trust her.

HE RETURNED to the shadows along the bank, left the saddle, sat on his heels, smoked and let his thoughts roil about, unsure of what to think. The story of Pete Croy was unbelievably false, yet with partisan aggressiveness Sue accepted what was evidently the Bevartses explanation. They called Yank Arnold the liar and trouble-maker. He smiled grimly in the hope that the Bevartses and Yank Arnold would claw each other into shreds.

When he left the river he rode in the opposite direction from Moheela, staying on the Arnold range. It was an often used trick of his to double-back and lay low, the same as that of wolves and foxes. He didn't want to leave the Santsander, not before Cora Arnold arrived and he had talked with her. And his bitterness toward Yank Arnold was increased because Yank had not only called Rodiker's doggedly honest folks white-trash and thieves but, thinking Rodiker was a man named "Jackson" and on the dodge, had offered him a job with no questions asked. *To be an outlaw is all right as long as Yank Arnold can make use of him; which shows he's no damn good his own self!*

In the distance he saw a block-shaped shadow with a pin-point of light through it. He headed that way and, finding a small field of fenced corn, knew it was a nester's place and no friend of Arnold's would be there.

A dog came at him before he hallooed. Then a man appeared in the lighted doorway and a tow-headed girl about knee-high clung to her daddy's leg and peered at the tall horseman who asked could he get supper and stay the night. Rodiker let on that he was a stranger who had got turned around when he wanted to reach town, and now his horse was too tired to go farther.

The raw-boned farmer hemmed and hawed.

His chunky wife came to the door. The moon was just rising and she looked him over distrustfully, but as if it was her duty to feed the hungry stranger, she said, "Sup-

per's long since done but you can have some left-overs. And you'll bed down in the stable."

NEXT morning the horse limped when brought to water, and Rodiker made out that he was just a stray cowhand with a horse that had gone lame; but, wanting to earn the Baddens' goodwill, he heaved up well water on a windlass and carried it to the garden for onions, turnips, squash and such. And he chopped wood. The wood was mostly mesquite roots that had been dug up and snaked in. The dog and little girl tagged him, the tiny child chattering. But Rodiker could tell that the Baddens, and especially Mrs. Badden, were untrusting.

About suppertime on the third day he carried in an armful of wood and dumped it behind the stove. Mrs. Badden wiped biscuit dough off her fingers before she turned and asked:

"Did Col. Arnold send you here?"

"Why do you think a thing like that?" Pent-up anger blew words at him. "Your horse ain't no more lame than I am! You got a piece of chip fitted in the left front shoe. I was raised with horses and I looked!"

He grinned. "That was so I could stay on here and get good food for a little of nothing."

She showed her spunk with, "I don't believe a word of it! You ain't never left off that gun a minute—which ain't a good sign in a stranger. And you're the first cow-hand I ever saw that helped around a farmin' place instead of squatting' on his heels an' smokin' while other folks worked. So you must be up to somethin'. Did Col. Arnold send you?"

"No. Why do you think he might've?"

"You would lie, wouldn't you?"

"Most likely I would, yes, M'a'm."

"Well, that's more honest than I thought you'd be! So I'll just show you!" She washed her hands and dried them, then took a piece of paper from under a plate on a shelf. "Last week this was stuck on a gate post out front!"

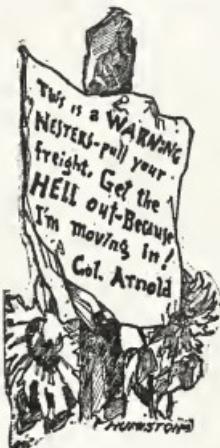
Rodiker read: "*This is a warning. Nesters, pull your freight. Get the hell out because I'm moving in. Col. Arnold.*"

Rodiker fingered the paper and asked, "Do you think Yank Arnold would send somebody like me in as a kind of spy to

learn what you folks were going to do about it?"

Mrs. Badden came up close and, being short and chunky, she tilted her head to look straight into his face.

"I don't know. But you are up to something! Your horse ain't lame. Cowboys afoot are the laziest fellows on earth, yet you've worked like a horse—so it must be to fool us. Baby Nell has taken such a shine to you, you can't be all bad; but something ain't right, now is it?"



"Do you want that I ride off?"

She gathered the end of her apron to wipe at the sweat on her face. "I don't reckon you mean to murder us in our beds and burn down the house. I want to like an' trust people, but abody just don't dare! It's lonesome here with no neighbors near. I know how Yank Arnold don't want us. Last time Badden went to town Old Mr. Bevarts, who got us to homestead out here, warned him to watch out for Col. Arnold's men. Said Arnold was about set to start a drive on all us nesters. Then a thing like this stuck on our gate post!"

Rodiker didn't rest well that night. He relieved the horse's lameness and considered leaving at once, but decided that wouldn't look so good. Mrs. Badden's shrewdness was disturbing.

During the night uneasiness staggered through his dozing and every sound set him listening, as the hunted always listen. Some-

time before sunup he was aroused by the fever-like dream of a posse riding down on him and he jumped up to find that a part of what aroused him was no dream; there was the pound of hoofs and far-off yells, the nearer shriek of Mrs. Badden, the furious barking of the dog and the bang of a gun.

Rodiker, rifle in hand, sprang to the stable door. It wasn't quite daylight. A big bunch of cows had been hazed into the yard and garden about the house. As horned shapes hurtled out of the dawn-dusk a few ran close enough by the stable door for him to see the broad A brand. The warning tacked to the Badden gate post was being fulfilled, and Rodiker's thought swirled curses on Yank Arnold.

A shotgun banged in the yard and banged again. A steer bellowed in pain. Shotgun or not, range cattle couldn't be turned by a man on foot. The bellowing and hoof-thud of cattle made him think as quickly as an echo bounces, what a fool cattlemen Arnold was to run weight off his own stock; there were simpler and more forceful ways of making nesters take the road out.

Rodiker's horse was saddled by the time Badden came through the wide-open stable door with a shotgun in one hand and a clenched fist trembling above his head. He was barefooted and in underwear, just as he had tumbled from his bed; and he was dry-eyed but sobbed curses, and swore that he would kill Arnold; if it took to his dying day he would kill him!

Now he begged for Rodiker's horse and rifle because, when the cattle first broke into the yard, Mrs. Badden had rushed out with a blanket and tried to turn them from her garden, and the steers had trampled the little Badden girl and her dog when she ran from the house to be with her mother.

As Rodiker brushed by him, leading the horse, the rawboned Badden began to struggle, trying to seize the rifle and take the horse so he could ride out and fight the men who had stampeded the cattle on him. He was crazy-mad and swung the shotgun like a club. Rodiker fended and wrenched it from him, tossed it aside, and hit the saddle.

His glance swept through the dawn and knew that the cows had been driven in across the nipped barbed wire of the Badden

cornfield; and he could hear men still whooping and yelling but he couldn't see them through the dust that hoofs had stirred in the field. Of course, Arnold had ordered it done to terrify other nesters; but Rodiker hopefully thought that such a stampede as this would unite all nesters in a range war against the colonel. Arnold had said he would shoot or hang rustlers, and Rodiker thought, *I'd like to hang him and all his men for this!* and meant it.

His horse went bound on bound by the house where Mrs. Badden was crouched on the threshold with a blanket-wrapped bundle in her arms. Loose hair was over her bowed face but she jerked up her head, flinging the hair aside and stared wildly at him. Rodiker flashed by before her lips moved but he felt that curses followed him.

XI

THE cornfield was too soft for fast riding. So he headed out to get beyond the field's southwest corner and circle around beyond it to the west. He watched toward the bank of dust that was like a thin dark fog hanging over the field in the still morning air. He didn't know how many men were out there, but not many from the sound of the yelling; and since range cattle scatter widely in their feeding, he also knew that it had taken some days for a few men to gather and trail the herd near the Baddens for the morning raid. Also he knew these men weren't afraid of attack and pursuit from a nester who wouldn't have anything but work horses to ride; and maybe they hadn't intended to trample anybody to death, but they had the same as murdered a baby and he would kill them if he could.

When he rounded the field's west corner he saw three men in a bunch a half mile off and coming hell-for-leather, but their faces were turned back over their shoulders in a way that meant they had been surprised and were riding off.

Here beyond the cornfield the ground was untilled and nearly level, and Rodiker lifted his horse with stroke of spurs, going headlong. In the full sunrise the men ahead caught sight of him and reined up hard, uncertainly milling together; but one man against three seemed to decide them, and

they came on. Rodiker hadn't changed pace, but now lifted his rifle, steadyng it with the hand that held the reins and, going full lope, fired over the top of the horse's head. A man went out of the saddle as if jerked by a rope about his throat.

Instantly the other men wheeled sharply, but instead of making for the open country they put their horses over the sagging strands of barbed wire and cut right into the cornfield as if the corn and thin dust-mist would give them concealment.

Cattle were in the corn, trampling and snatching, bellowing. The sun was bright now and the fresh dust the horsemen kicked up was like a smoke trail.

Rodiker understood why they had turned into the field: in the distance he saw a bunch of strung-out riders coming, and coming fast, over the ridge of a northwest rise. The stampeder had no way of escape except through the field itself.

Rodiker rode back the way he had come. Hard riding on solid earth would tire a horse less than plodding through ploughed ground, and he meant to head the two men off if they tried to angle out of the field. But they went straight through, making for Badden's yard, perhaps intending to reach the open country beyond. The ploughed field pulled the wind out of their horses. Badden's shotgun banged. Rodiker then stopped, raised in his stirrups, swung up his rifle and, holding the sights for a guess at something above 300 yards, fired. A horse dropped beside the Badden well.

Badden had wounded the other horse. Now the two men were afoot and broke for the stable to hole up there. Badden's work horses were loose in the barnyard but, even if saddled, they couldn't make much of a run—not from the four or five pursuing horsemen who had cut through the cornfield and were dashing into and around the Badden place. They piled off and took shelter anywhere they could scrouge down about the stable.

None of them had come near enough for him to see what brand they rode, but they were grim, not noisy, and under the orders of a heavy round-shouldered man. They fired at the stable and the men in these fired back.

Rodiker was unsure of what he might be in for by staying near these men who had

rather the air of a posse doing what seemed proper justice and, meaning to keep pretty well out of sight, at least for a time, he rode up beside the Badden house and was still in the saddle when a horse swept around the house and pulled down alongside of him.

His surprise was as great as Kate Arnold's but he showed it less. She sat a side saddle as though she had grown there, and gasped when she reined up short.

"You!" she said, her dark eyes blazing. "You dare to sneak-hide here!" Her face wasn't pale now; it was hot with anger and had a kind of blistered red from wind and sunburn, and was tired too, but her chin was up and her lips curled. "After I was the fool to be more than fair with you!"

He gazed hard-eyed and doubtful, feeling that he was in for a bad time of it; and suddenly he didn't care because it seemed that she, having watched the stampede from afar, had come to try to help the men in the stable and he said, "The hell with you! You and every cow and man you've got!"

She swung up her hand and gripped the quirt a-dangle on her wrist, and her hand hung in mid-air for the steadiness in his rage-filled eyes made her pause until she cried out, "I'd kill you if I could!" and the quirt swept down with swift encircling swish across his neck and shoulder. He didn't move.

The heavy round-shouldered man in charge of the riders was coming up a-foot with a waddling hurry, and he stopped stock-still as the quirt fell; but Kate faced toward him as she cried in delirious fury:

"Marl, take this man and hang him—like you said you would!"

Rodiker thought *It's come!* and made no visible move but tautness coiled inside of him like a tight-wound spring; to rein back and draw and shoot and turn and go seemed what he would have to do, and he was ready; but the big-faced Marl said:

"God A'mighty, Miss Kate! You're dead wrong! He's not one of them! 'Twas him that headed 'em off! 'Cause of him is how we cornered 'em! I just come up to thank him!"

Kate made a faint queer sound, her face for a moment turning dull as in a daze. Marl's puzzled eyes were laced with a net of wrinkles; and he peered at Rodiker, peered

toward Kate, and pushed up his hat and rubbed at the red crease of the tight band on his forehead; then he asked:

"How come, Miss Kate, you got such a wrong idea about him?"

She wouldn't say anything but entreaty was in her eyes as she stared at Rodiker; and his voice was ice-hard though he told Marl, "Wrong ideas are not hard to get. I had some myself in thinking it was your men drove these damned cows in! The Baddens found a warning on their gate that Col. Arnold wrote to tell them to pull out. So when—"

Kate cried, "No such thing! They never! The colonel gives his warnings face to face—not stick them on a fence post in the dark!"

"—So when A-branded steers broke in here and tramped the little Badden girl to death, I thought it was your men drove them in!"

Kate's voice broke whisperingly, "Child?"

HE pointed toward the house. She looked around then back at Rodiker and was motionless for the time it takes to draw a long breath slowly. After that she slid almost as if falling from the saddle, dropped the reins, then gathered her riding skirt about her and stumbled as she ran for the open door.

Marl's look followed until she was inside. He was heavy-set, slow-moving, perhaps slow-thinking, and scratched far back under his hat. "You a friend of the Baddens?"

"Some."

"Lucky you was here."

"I'm Jackson. The fellow that brought Miss Kate from town some nights ago."

"So you're him? The colonel, I hear, was some put out by how you run away."

"You've talked with him?"

"No, with Miss Kate."

Rodiker put his fingers to the quirt's mark on his neck; and, knowing now that Kate had not told him who he was, felt much the same relief as when awakened from a dream of falling. He said, "I made her mad. She's still mad. It's always best to leave when a woman's mad. Maybe now, too, it would be best."

Marl nearly smiled. His slight nod was understanding as he looked at the quirt's mark. "That's when she thought you was

one of them. When I thought they was just rustlers, I said I'd hang 'em."

He turned and listened to the sound of guns.

They weren't being fired fast or often. Marl spoke calmly:

"They'd like to kill some of us. They're waitin' for dark. Think maybe then they can slip out. I'll burn the stable first. When they come out, I'll hang 'em." He might have been talking about rabbits in a burrow and the skins he was after.

Marl swung his thick arm toward the cornfield, indicating the damage done there. "We lose a lot of cows from rustlers and nesters, too, but a thing like this—why?"

Rodiker recalled what Old Mr. Bevarts had told Badden in town and said, "Somebody wanted to make it look like your men did it."

MARL nodded. "But hell, we'd have let the corn grow, then cut the fence so cows could wander in an' eat. Put fat on 'emselves—not run it off, like in a stampede!"

"How come Miss Kate is along?"

"Cause I can't handle her an' the colonel's not home!" Marl's was a worried smile. "As a little tyke she was hard to handle when she took the bit in her teeth. Hasn't changed none by bein' Back East. I guess she'll allus do like she wants. She knows how to make men let her!"

Rodiker's hand absently touched the mark on his neck and he murmured commendation. "It's all right. She thought I was one of them! If so, hangin' was what I needed."

Marl said, "Yes," gravely; then explained: "Yesterday a Mexican kid rode in and told her he'd seen some men bunchin' cows over this way. Rustlers, he thought. So'd she. We're havin' trouble. Lots!"

Rodiker, knowing how widely the colonel's cattle ranged, nodded and thought, *I hope you have lots more!*

"Instead of sendin' somebody, she lit out and come herself to where I was at Old Place. I scraped together a few boys an' we headed down the river. She wouldn't go home. Stayed with us all night out in the open while we were tryin' to find where they were. She sort o' fell behind this mornin' when we spread out to close in. That's why she didn't see you knock that

man out of the saddle an' turn the other two in here."

Marl drew a larg^e blue handkerchief, mopped about his neck. "A child, you say?"

The flicker of Rodiker's eyelids answered. After a pause he asked, "What horses did they ride?"

Marl looked up steadily and his deep voice was slow, almost casual. "Lazy S's. Of course, fellows steal 'em and do things that give the Bevartses a bad name. Or like that Pete Croy you shot. 'Twas his own private grudge. He just happened to have borrowed a horse without askin'. Or like some years ago when Rodiker shot Craig Arnold. A Lazy S horse—but the Bevartses had nothin' to do with the murder. They never expected these horses to be seen today, no more'n the one Rodiker rode. They are pure-hearted, clean-handed, sweet-faced, fair-minded, yeah!"

Marl turned his head to spit. It was, and he meant it to be, as if he cleaned his mouth after such untrue words.

Rodiker stepped from the saddle, let the reins dangle across a forearm. Marl turned from him and walked toward the rear of the house. Rodiker dropped the reins and moved up alongside of Marl who stood with legs spread, hands palm-down on his hips, and watched toward the stable. The morning sun was bright and growing hot. The guns were stilled. Some longhorns munched in the garden and other steers were drifting back into the corn that Badden's sweat had watered.

Badden lay in a peering huddle behind the planking of his draw-well. He hadn't a hat, was still in underwear, now sweat-streaked and earth-stained. The single-barreled shotgun was poked out for quick firing. A dead horse lay sprawled between him and the stable.

Then the racket of gunfire started up. In the open air the reports were thin; black smoke puffed out, gathered into small ragged clouds and hung low in the windless heat.

Marl's voice had a pleased rumble as he turned to Rodiker, saying, "We'll scorch their tails in a—"

Amid the bang of guns that were not close was the close up thud of lead into flesh. Marl stumbled, his hat dropped behind him and he fell face-down as a dead weight falls, his arms out-stretched and his palms flat.

Right off another bullet went by Rodiker's head, and he spun on a heel and jumped. From the shelter of the kitchen wall he could see the hole in the side of Marl's head. When he stepped back to the horse and pulled his rifle from the scabbard he heard a yell that was more than a yell; it was a squall of lament, piercingly rageful. Badden's voice and the words weren't distinguishable but he fired the shotgun in futile vengeance. Badden knew that Marl was dead.

Rodiker went to the front stoop and looked through the door toward where both women were crouched, knees down, over a pallet by the wall, and one was sobbing. He pulled his hat and said, "Miss Kate?"

She didn't move but Mrs. Badden looked up and was staringly dry-eyed, with lips tight as a seam; and though she didn't say anything, not with words, her eyes were questioning as in her grief she now reconsidered her first suspicions of him.

He stepped inside, hat in one hand, the rifle in the other and, bending over Kate's shoulder, looked toward the pallet where the small child's face was black with the bruises that had come with death, and his heart hurt in remembering her toddling and babbling at his heels.

"Miss Kate," he said, "Marl has been shot and is dead."

Kate's hat hung down between her shoulders from thongs. She didn't look up but pulled a fold of the bombazine riding skirt to her eyes, then put a hand to her throat and seemed to hold down her sobs. "Dead? This child is dead! And you say Marl?"

"Yes."

SHE stood up slowly, still wiping at her eyes. The quirt was on her wrist and she dropped the weighted hem of the skirt, then staggered a little, for her knees were cramped from being on the floor.

He put an arm about her and she yielded weakly for a moment, but only a moment; then her face lifted and she pulled away. It was as if tears had drained weakness out of her and left her strong because she said, "Follow me!" and holding up the front of her skirt she went before him from the house.

He looked down at her tear-smudged face. At first she caught her breath in hiccoughing

sighs, but the hiccoughing stopped and she said, "You take charge!" It was a command and her dark eyes glittered with grief and anger through the undried tears.

He carefully told her, "No." His voice was gentle in saying, "I am a stranger to your men. Pick one of them."

Kate's face was wind-burned and sun-scorched; the tender complexion she had brought from Back East was already ruined; her hair was a rat's nest tangle, her eyes red and swollen, but she came up on her tiptoes to be taller and had a manner of wrathful dignity with:

"You shall take charge! I do not know the other men and I do know you! Remember that!"

HE SAID nothing. He didn't move, not even an eyelid. There was no more expression than in a dead man's stare and as much steadiness. Her eyes turned away from under the weight of his look, and she groped for her hat, set it on her head with the pretense of caring how her mussedup hair was arranged under the hat. When her glance again slid back to his eyes, he caught and held it, asking:

"Why haven't you told a ready?"

"It wouldn't have been fair. Not after how you brought me home, and were nearly murdered!"

"But you will now if I don't let you blindhalter me?"

She lifted her chin, stiffened, said defiantly, "Something like that, yes!"

His sullen voice told her, "You can go straight to hell!"

Kate gasped. "Oh!" she said; then, "Oh," again more quietly. She looked as serious as a small tired child who is trying to be truthful even if不相信. "You've got to understand! And help. Please help me! I said I knew you, meaning I know how strong and capable you are! I wasn't trying to threaten you. Really not!" She moved a hand behind her toward the doorway. "It was our cows! I feel somehow to blame. And so helpless!" She swung the quirt savagely, striking herself below the knee and the smack of leather on the black bombazine was a reproach to the womanhood that put her in skirts. "How I hate not being a man!"

He began to feel unpride of how he had

answered her implied threat; and it had been a threat, though she denied it now.

All in a breath she was telling him, "The colonel is home and sick in bed—"

"Marl said he wasn't home."

"That's what I said to keep Marl from riding there. And I didn't tell the colonel the truth either! If he'd heard where rustlers were he'd have got out of bed and into boots and mounted a horse if he had to be tied in the saddle. He is sick!"

"When the Mexican boy told me there were rustlers over here, not a man was home but Sam, who's too heavy for fast riding. Old Johnny doesn't count. He's too stove-up to kick a horse into a lope. I had to go myself."

"I told the colonel I would visit overnight with Anita. Then I lit out for Old Place to find Marl. He tried to persuade me to go back but I wouldn't—couldn't!—because I'd said I'd be away all night. And I had to tell Marl the colonel wasn't home, or he'd have known if there was news of rustlers the colonel would have come himself. Marl tried to make me stay behind last night and I wouldn't because—well—just because!"

Kate reached out and grasped his unbuttoned vest and held on, and again her words whirred as if she could talk without pausing for breath.

"Please help me! My papa is sick—that's why I came from the East. Sam had Old Johnny's wife write me. And I never wrote back that I was coming. Papa might have said, 'No!' and it was so much simpler just to come. And he is sick!"

"Marl says our cattle are not only being stolen but some of our men must be helping, and that is worrying the colonel. He likes to trust his men implicitly. Who are they, Marl says, no knowing. But it must be, otherwise cattle couldn't be stolen as they are. With the colonel sick—oh, don't you see? And there's nobody here but you that I can trust now that Marl is dead, so won't you, please?"

Rodiker's hand, with gentle force, loosened her grasp on his vest, then he absently reached up alongside his neck, touching the welt because it burned. Now he rather liked the courageous wrath that had put it there when she thought he had thrown in with rustlers, or something of

that kind; but Kate misunderstood his gesture and said:

"That shows how much I need somebody to keep me from mistakes!"

"You know how I feel about Yank Arnold."

"And I know he thinks he's right. You know he isn't. So if you help us like you can, then he will know that a man like you just couldn't have done a thing like he has thought of you!"

"And if I don't do like you want?"

Kate wasn't trying to threaten now; she showed him the small ungloved hands in a gesture that indicated helplessness, then twitched her skirt, looked down and shrugged, but lifted her eyes to say, "when I haven't told yet, do you think I ever would?"

"One thing I think about you is you don't mind lyin'!"

Kate looked right at him. "Men are so stupid-stubborn, however else can you make them do like they ought!"

Rodiker said, "I make no promises to you," then swung his arm toward the open doorway. "But the Baddens have been like friends. If they ain't shot, I want those fellows hung! I can get 'em out of there, but I don't like to burn a poor man's barn to chase out rats!"

XII

RODIKER talked to Mrs. Badden, and her round face hadn't any expression other than the blankness of inattentive listening, but when he finished she nodded jerkily, drew a long breath.

"Go ahead. We're ruint now and will pull out. Anyhow, I wouldn't stay—no' after how she died. Seems a shameful pity this world ain't big enough for all us folks that's in it. But some are allus crowdin' other folks and hurtin' them." She looked at Kate. "We'll go away, Miss, then your cows can feed where our home was."

Kate flushed, the words hurt so much, and she set her mouth hard to keep from crying out; and in the kitchen she told Rodiker, "That wasn't fair! She knows we didn't do it!"

He said, "She knows, too, you Arnolds will be glad to have them gone!"

He picked up a half-filled coal oil can.

A small piece of potato was stuck on the spout. "Take this," he said to Kate. She accepted the oil can then stood watching him. He searched and found a flour sack that had been washed, and after that a roll of binder twine. His "Here!" was impersonal as he put them into Kate's hand.

He used a hatchet to knock a board of straight-grained pine from the top of the homemade kitchen table, then tramped through the front room with the board and hatchet. Kate followed, her hands clumsily full and the shot-hemmed riding skirt in the way of her feet. She had heard him say to Mrs. Badden that if the men weren't smoked out before dark they might get away between sundown and moonrise; and she wondered if he had made escapes of the kind.

Outside the house he told Kate to tear the sack into inch-wide strips, when he went back and said to Mrs. Badden that he wanted some cotton. She pointed to the comforter where the dead baby lay. He drew a heavy knife, opened a blade, got on his knees to rip into the comforter with as much gentleness as if careful not to awaken the child.

Again outside, he split the three-foot table top into strips almost two inches wide, these he hacked and whittled into arrow-headed shape, and made the notch for sling-ing about a third of the way back from the head. After that he chopped down the slender willow that had been planted before the door, trimmed off the branches, then shook the pole, trying its resilience as a fisherman tries a rod. He shortened it to a length that was suitable, then crossed to Kate's horse and cut tie thongs from her saddle. He made incisions in the thongs and looped them end to end. After tying a knot in one end, he fastened the other to the willow pole.

Rodiker squatted on his knees before Kate and had her hold the darts while he wrapped the flour sack's strips about the cotton, one after another. He pulled the piece of potato from the spout of the can and soaked the arrow-shaped darts with coal oil.

He took up the three-foot darts and, going to the kitchen corner, put a match near the middle of a dart's shaft; then he fitted the thongs knot into the notch, stepped out in the open and let fly. The pole was stiffly

springy, but it wasn't the springiness alone that sent the dart: his powerful right-handed jerk hurled it with the force of an arrow from a bow. The dart, not truly shaped, weaved in its flight, but nevertheless struck the side of the stable some fifty yards away, then dropped to the ground. The oil-soaked rag and cotton still burned.

He threw more fire-winged darts until one landed in the haystack back of the stable. That brought a yell from the surprised Arnold man who was snugged down there to watch the stable's back door.

In a half minute the stack was on fire; and Badden came loping from the well to the house, still carrying his shotgun though he was out of shells. His lank grimy face had the look of a joyful maniac as he rushed at Rodiker and yelled:

"Burn 'em alive! That's the ticket! I knowed you was an all right feller from the time I laid eyes on you!"

The haystack began to burn with the swirling fury that flames stir up even when the day is windless, and spark-filled gray smoke burst toweringly, whipped up by the fire on its flanks. The burning wisps that were sucked high overhead drifted about and died there, the ash falling like a flight of black insects.

Mrs. Badden came outside and gazed stonily until Rodiker passed her and she said, "I don't like to hate people but I ain't enough Christian not to be glad!"

RODIKER mounted his horse and rode out in the open. He couldn't be shot at, not accurately, through the stable's fire and smoke-filled cracks; and, anyhow, the men in there now had other things to think about than shooting at somebody.

The rear stable door faced the fired stack and nobody thought the men would emerge there but Rodiker, making sure, rode over that way and the flames threw a blistering heat in his face.

Soon he saw a rider coming at a furious lope down the roadway past the house, recognized him, then did not look again until the horse, as sweat-wet as if he had swum a river, was pulled up abruptly alongside his own horse; and Colonel Arnold, gauntly drawn of face and gray with unshaven bristles, was bolt upright in the saddle. He looked sick, but wrath was in his sunken

eyes, a kind of red wrath as if they caught and reflected the flames.

He shouted out, "What the hell, sir, is the meaning of this!"

Rodiker looked at him steadily and hated him; and Rodiker's eyes narrowed, his voice slid into a drawl, insolent and meaningful.

"'W'y, Colonel, you act like you maybe didn't know your cows come in here at sunup through a cut fence over yonder with men on their tails! Your steers stomped a baby to death, ruined a corn crop and garden, and the men that drove 'em are holed up in that stable. We're smokin' 'em out!"

Colonel Arnold glared as if struck speechless; and Rodiker, in a lazy sounding way, added, "Looks like you sent 'em in to drive out nesters, but you ought've let your foreman and Miss Kate in on the trick because Mal got himself killed and Miss Kate—"

Colonel Arnold's eyes were closed and he reeled in the saddle with one hand loosely on the horn and the other groping to find it. He had the look of a man who had been shot. Getting out of a sick bed and riding through heat, then being talked to as Rodiker had talked, hit the colonel about like a sunstroke.

Rodiker had wanted to hurt, and he had; but now he jumped from the saddle and, reaching up, caught Yank Arnold as he sagged like a dead man in a head-down lurch. Miss Kate came stumbling with the long skirts in a heavy flutter about her ankles, and dread pulling at her eyes. Rodiker strode by her, carrying the long lean and now unconscious man toward the Badden house. She ran to keep up and panted breathlessly in screaming questions above the fire's roar, but Rodiker wouldn't say anything.

The stable was now a hellish blaze, throwing its heat into the hot morning with the crackle and crash that flames make when they gnaw on wood. The corralled work horses plunged at a far fence corner, breaking through; and the saddle horses backed away from the increasing heat, and noise like the coming of a tempest. They dragged their reins with necks timidly extended, fearful of the snubbing that had taught them to stand ground-hitched.

For all Rodiker knew or cared the men who had been in the stable were by now

burned to a crisp; and what he had in mind was to ride off as soon as he could make his departure seem unhurried. Though having the man he hated helpless in his arms was like a wish fulfilled, Rodiker hadn't malevolence enough to gloat. He had hit with words as hard as fist blows, and they had hurt, but that small revenge seemed paltry now.

He laid the colonel down before the house where the ground was littered by splinters and shavings that had tapered the arrow-shaped darts, and Kate dropped to her knees beside her father, but Rodiker told her to fetch water.

Mrs. Badden came up and said, "Maybe he ought a-be laid inside on the bed."

"The ground's good enough. He'll come to—or he won't."

Kate dropped her riding skirt, stepped out of it, and ran to bring a dipper full of water but in her hurry hadn't thought of a towel. Rodiker took a handkerchief from his pocket for her to dip into the water. She was wetting the colonel's forehead when men walked up; six of them and two were prisoners.

Sweat was on the men, and sift of ashes; all were tired, dirty, unshaven. A lanky man with tobacco in his mouth looked uncertainly at Rodiker, then toward the colonel who lay as if asleep.

Kate stood up with the water-sopped red handkerchief a-drip in her hand and pointed at Rodiker.

"He's in charge!" And refusing to admit that her father had such unmanly weakness as to faint, she said, "The colonel had an accident, so now Mr. Jackson here is in charge."

Putting "Mister" before his name at once gave Rodiker increased importance and Arnold's men gazed tiredly and were expectant as he stepped closer and looked at the two captured men. Their wrists were lashed behind them, their eyes sullenly insolent, their bristly faces dark with sweat, dirt, ashes.

He asked, "Who are they?"

No one answered at once. Arnold's men eyed the prisoners, looked at Rodiker, then the man with the tobacco in his cheek said, "The Walters brothers. Got a little brand and a bad name over south. Won't talk, they say. Say take 'em in to the sheriff."

RODIKER poked his thumbs into his belt, looked studiously from one to the other of the Walters brothers; then he told them:

"Nobody gives a damn whether or not you talk. If you want to go to hell with your mouth shut, suits me! You think we'll take you in and turn you over to the sheriff, then Old Jerym Bevarts'll get you loose. We know he figured that the best way to give Yank Arnold a worse name than he's got with nesters was to run a stampede of Arnold cows in here on the Baddens, and he bully-whacked you fellows into doin' just that! I guess he picked you because you've been rustling cows and knew the range hereabouts."

Rodiker quit talking to the Walters brothers and looked at the Arnold men. All were saddle-toughened, sag-hipped, and stared solemnly. The one who chewed tobacco spit without moving his eyes.

Rodiker said, "It's poor pay for what these Badden folks have suffered, but take these men away and hang 'em! On top of all else, they killed a baby girl!"

The Walters brothers gulped and swallowed hard as sullenness went out of their eyes and hard breath rasped their throats; and nobody made a move until the tobacco chewer said:

"You heard. Come on! It's time what's right was done in this damn' country!"

They turned and moved off in a bunch.

Colonel Arnold got to his feet. His gray hair was bedraggled from Kate's anxious sopping and he wiped about his face as if at sweat, all the while frowning with stern and puzzled steadiness; then he said:

"Jackson!"

Rodiker faced about and the colonel came forward and peered with a kind of anger that had uncertainty in it. He said:

"You couldn't have done more of what I wanted if I had told you what I wanted, yet a while ago you said you thought I sent those men in here to stampede my own cattle and ruin these people."

He stopped. Rodiker waited for something more and Kate's dark gaze hung on his face, shocked and incredulous.

The colonel glared while Rodiker told him with quiet anger:

"I never said I thought it of you. But I did say how it could look. I wanted to show you what it's like to have folks believe what

ain't so. You big rich men have everything so much your own way you never know what some folks have to put up with!"

The colonel stiffened; he seemed stunned and wondering, then looked toward Kate and quickly looked away, saying to Rodiker, "You come with me. We'll talk this over."

THE colonel walked off as stiff-legged as if on stilts, and Rodiker faced about to follow but Kate caught hold of him and jerked. He looked down and she pressed close and rose on tiptoes to whisper fiercely, "I'll tell! So help me God, I'll tell if you say things like that about my papa!"

"Things like what?"

"That he drove those cows in here!"

"You heard what I didn't say. Ears like yours don't do anybody any good! But maybe now you can feel a little of what its like to be lied about, like I been!"

He swung around, leaving her; and the colonel waited some sixty feet away, his eyes now following the mounted men, and one of the horses was carrying double, as they rode slowly toward the river where there would be a tree tall enough.

Rodiker stood beside the colonel and looked at the hawk-like profile. Pride was in the face and illness, too. The illness did not in any way touch Rodiker's sympathy and he wished for a fulfillment that would knock the pride into trampled bits.

Colonel Arnold shifted his gaze studiously at Rodiker. "Why are you so bitter toward me?"

Rodiker almost told him, but that would have meant a showdown with no chance—other than violence offered—to win, and would ruin what hope he had of putting his fingers to Cora Arnold's throat. He felt that Yank Arnold wouldn't give up until she gave him up; and now Rodiker answered bluntly with:

"I don't trust you!"

"From how you just spoke to me, I take it that somewhere, sometime, you have been falsely accused."

Rodiker's eyelids slowly fell and rose in affirmation.

"I've tried to be your friend, Jackson."

"I can't have friends. I'm on the dodge."

"I won't ask questions, but do you care to tell me if this man Rodiker you've spoken of is in anyway to blame?"

Rodiker hesitated, unsure of just where this might end, then said cautiously, "Some." "In that case, Jackson, why can't you trust me?"

"Because you've got it in for him, too?" "Yes."

"But any time you don't happen to like what I do, you can send word to the sheriff to look me over. So it's about the same as giving you the end of a rope that's about my neck!"

THE colonel stiffened, but held down his temper. "I see. But no man on earth dares say I ever broke my word! I need you. With Marl dead, I am in greater need. I, too, find it hard to find somebody I can trust. The Bevartses have evidently induced some of my own men to join in rustling. They are cunning, these Bevartses! You'll find out. How did you guess it was they who sent my cattle in here?"

Rodiker's bearded smile was twisted, ironic, hard, unamused. "You're too smart a man to run meat off your own cows—'specially when you could cut a fence and let 'em fatten on the nester's corn! Anyhow, they rode Lazy S's. And will Old Jerym and the sheriff be riled by the hanging of their friends?"

"No. They won't. Not openly. They won't dare. They'll say that I did right! You'll see. And will you work for me?"

He said, "A while;" and thought, *At least till next week when Cora Arnold's here.*

Colonel Arnold lay resting in the hot shade of the Badden house. It was hard for him to breathe. Mrs. Badden brought out a corn husk pillow and a palm leaf fan for Kate, then went back in the house.

Kate swept the fan above her father's face a few times as he talked severely to her; then her hand fell as if the arm were broken. She sat motionless for a little while before she stood up and walked away as if not knowing where to go or what to do; but presently she picked her riding skirt from the ground and laid it across her saddle which Rodiker had taken from the horse he was now watering at the draw well. He had unsaddled and watered the colonel's horse, too. It was

the horse, not the colonel, he cared about.

She sauntered to the well and smiled unhappily. He said, "Why don't you stay out of the sun?" but seemed to mean, *Why don't you stay away from me?*

Kate said in a disheartened voice, "I am a liar."

He let the bucket rattle down and splash heavily. "Are you braggin'?"

In a kind of scandalized mutter she added, "I lie to people that trust me."

He said, "They're the only kind a body can lie to."

"Early this morning a man came from Old Place and told that Marl and some men—with me along—lit out last night to lay for rustlers over on the flat near Badden's. So the colonel got out of bed and came. I told you he would."

Rodiker said nothing; and she went on. "You can never trust a liar. Once somebody has told you a lie—even if it's your own daughter, and you love her!—you can never be sure again. And your faith has been injured. Did you know that liars were such awful persons?"

He was heaving at the windlass and said nothing.

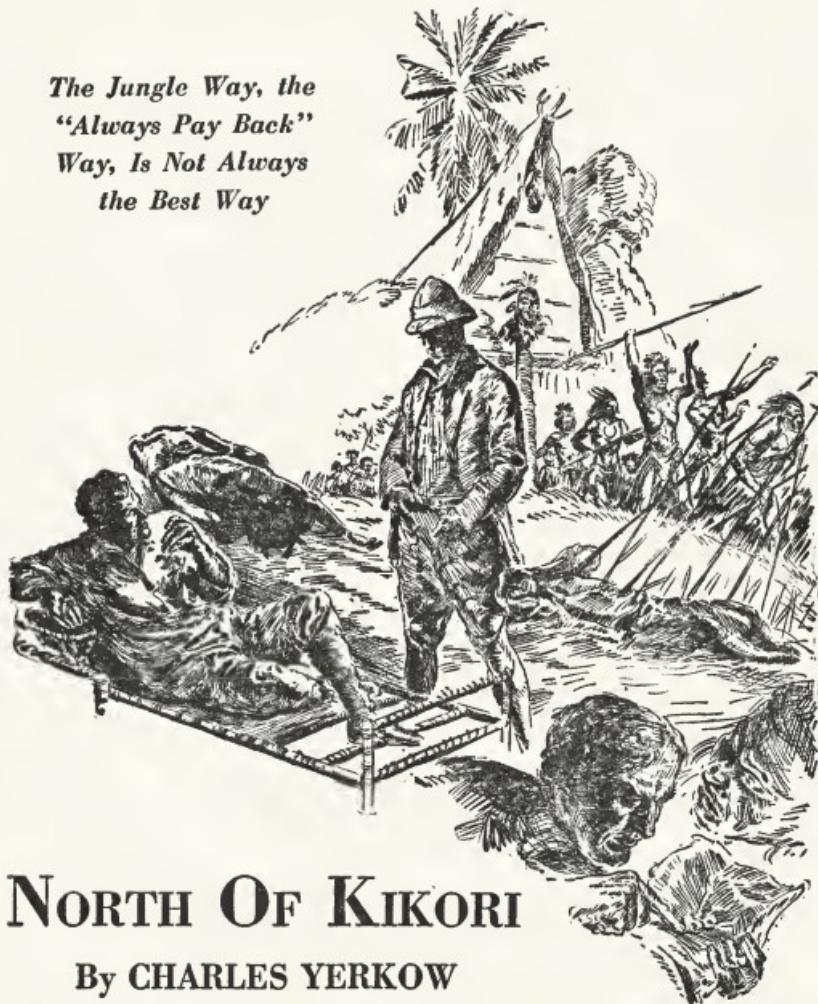
Kate angrily slapped the fan against her fist. "He's sick. That's why he acts like I had tried to cut his throat! I wanted to keep him in bed where he belongs and at the same time have the range taken care of as it ought to be! And now he blames me for all that's gone wrong!"

She turned the fan about and pointed with its handle toward the stable, still a-flicker with tiny flames that clung to charred wood. Tears gushed into her eyes and dribbled. "I don't care if he is my father, men can be unfair, stupid, cruel!"

Rodiker filled the bucket the horse had drunk from and lifted the bucket to the bench. "Here, wash your face."

He squatted on his heels with his back against the house and smoked as he gazed afar at nothing, and wondered just how much fool he was to stay on at Yank Arnold's and think it was a good place to hide out. Old Jerym would learn, and the Claytons, too. But Cora Arnold was coming in a few days.

*The Jungle Way, the
"Always Pay Back"
Way, Is Not Always
the Best Way*



NORTH OF KIKORI

By CHARLES YERKOW

THE hot jungle heat pressed down on the *kampong* and the morning chatter of cockatoos drifted across the clearing to the thatch-roofed house. Mister Knight sat hunched over his desk, morosely mulling over his district troubles one by one, absently shuffling through some reports, and all the while trying to push the Baba killing out of his mind.

Knight stroked his clean-shaven chin as he looked out the screened door at the low

barracks of his twenty-man Papuan Interior Constabulary. Sergeant Tulotu was filing the boys out into the clearing for their disliked morning drill. Above the harsh cry of a hornbill, the sergeant's loud orders started putting the boys through their paces. They were good and efficient boys, Knight reflected; they knew most of the hill dialects and tribe quirks, and they got things done, often over the heads of chieftains.

But the Baba killing crowded into Knight's mind, and he thought back to his

interview with the Resident Magistrate at Kikori.

"No point in giving you a wrong impression of Manaketa," the R. M. had said. "The district is wild, all right, and I suppose you'll do best by putting all your trust in Sergeant Tulotu. He'll steer you right so's you won't find yourself up a tree with the natives. And see what you can do about Ben Hower, the trader. Hower's a bad one, you know, but so far he's kept himself off the records. When Cortell was district officer up there, he couldn't do much with him. Lack of evidence. Rumor has it that Hower killed a pearly in Dasau, but we never got the facts on it. I've a suspicion he'll be a problem again—see if you can't handle him."

Two things. Put your trust in Sergeant Tulotu, and see if you can't handle Ben Hower, the trader. The remainder was supposed to be routine.

Knight scowled and cursed his appointment as district officer of Manaketa. He had hoped for Kikori, or Moresby, or any other partly-civilized coastal district, and now, with two months past, he admitted the wild New Guinea interior needed a tougher hand than his. The hill tribes were bad enough, but the petty difficulties of the white plantation owners, traders and pearl-ers who at times came up-river, all added to make the district a hell-hole.

KNIGHT spun the creaking swivel chair around to face the wall. He tried to center his thoughts on Ben Hower. Everyone knew that the trader bought snide pearls from native divers—for that matter he bought any and all stolen goods, and he always bought as cheaply as the circumstances permitted. Two days ago Baba, a Moki native diver on one of the coastal pearl-lugger, had been shot dead outside the *kampong*; he had been on his way home after the pearl-lung season, and it was assumed he had had some stolen pearls with him. Whoever shot him took those pearls, but finding pearls in Hower's house would prove exactly nothing. It was a clear enough case against Hower, but a D. O.'s office in Manaketa was not outfitted for ballistics tests.

Knight knew he must act, he must do something. There was the Resident Magis-

trate, who'd want a complete report on the Baba killing, and there were the Mokis—who'd want to see a white man punished or else they themselves would *pay back*. When Sergeant Tulotu had talked with the group of Mokis who came down from their villages, they had made it clear that the killing was not a tribal affair but that a white man was responsible, and they had continued to repeat: "We pay back—we pay back."

Absently, Knight scanned the papers before him. The R. M.'s note demanding that he settle the Brooks and Van Adden brawl, or at least induce both men to stop writing letters to the R. M. Somebody down-river at Dasau stole a sail from the Dutch trader, and it had to be looked into. A group of oil prospectors were coming up by launch—check their papers and let them have Smitty for a guide into Moki territory. Check on the rumor that the Dabo tribe had killed a Goraina man and now had his head in their main village. Is it true the native divers are selling stolen pearls? Is it true the Lilolis continue to bury their dead under their houses? And—the R. M.'s last wireless message was an emphatic question—is Ben Hower making trouble? The Baba killing had not had time yet to filter down to the coast.

SERGEANT TULOTU'S guttural drill commands brought Knight out of his thoughts. He turned around to look toward the clearing where the sergeant was putting the boys through a disjointed and quite awkward march, shifting far too often into turns and about-faces. Soon Tulotu hauled Corporal Lobo to the front and placed him in charge of the marching men, while he ambled to the house and up the steps to the veranda for his morning orders.

Tulotu was from the Dabo tribe—the same tribe where the men were keeping that Goraina head. The first report came from the Mission, and then a trader said he saw the head. Knight sighed. His job was to go up with a patrol and punish the Dabo tribe. A week ago, when he was up-river on patrol, some natives had supplied more information on that head incident, and now the matter was worse, for the fact that Tulotu's brother had been a member of the raiding party.

Knight knew that Tulotu was his im-

mediate problem; he and eight of the Constabulary boys were Dabo men. The others were coastal Soholis. The D. O. was well aware of the complex mental ways of the natives, even his Constabulary-trained boys; whenever he thought he understood some twisted action or remark on their part, he invariably found himself baffled by other, stranger reactions. It was like trying to guess the path of an underground burrowing ant.

There was the Baba killing, for which Ben Hower was to blame. And there was that head in the Dabo village. Knight cursed under his breath. Why the devil did Tulotu's tribe have to get themselves a head?

The sergeant, standing outside the door, made a sound.

Knight stood up.

"Come in, Tulotu," he called.

The sergeant's bare feet padded into the room; he stood stiffly at attention, his right arm raised to his skull cap in a rigid salute.

"Morning," Knight said. He searched Tulotu's face for a trace of the man's emotional attitude for the day, but the broad bland face remained loose, indifferent. The uniform, tan shirt and shorts, with the cartridge belt slung over the right shoulder, was in its second week of a badly-needed wash and mend.

The D. O. realized that the entire matter was touchy. He needed the sergeant's confidence and assistance to punish the Dabos for killing a Goraina man, and yet he feared Tulotu was making ready to bolt for his village to warn his brother and the men, to send them into the bush. On the other hand, there was the Baba killing with a white man mixed in it.

Two days ago Knight was certain Tulotu would run out on him, yet, again by the same strange behavior of most natives, the sergeant had stuck to his duties. When Baba's body was found and the Mokis came howling into Manaketa, it was Sergeant Tulotu who had quieted them and sent them away. To do that with eighteen unreasoning angry natives was a man-size job, but despite the praise he got, Tulotu fell back into his silence and sullenness.

Knight knew he must move carefully. He felt that perhaps a bit of responsibility would keep Tulotu in his place; it was a

futile and bare hope, for the D. O. knew how impossible it was to stop a native when his mind was once set on something. Nevertheless, Knight decided to try it.

"Think the Mokis will be down today?" he asked.

Tulotu grunted. "Mokis don' come today."

Knight hesitated for a moment, but then thought the better of asking the sergeant to explain. He'd get nothing but a twisted answer.

"I'm going over to Trader Hower's place," Knight said sternly and picked up his sun helmet. "You stay here, Tulotu. Keep good watch. If anything happens, send Corporal Lobo for me."

Tulotu adjusted his cartridge belt, said, "Mist' Knight go to bad man house. Tu-lotu stay here. Keep good watch."

Knight eyed the sergeant. "Maybe tomorrow we go to your village. Everybody says your people have one Goraina head."

Tulotu's eyes clouded. "Long time go Goraina kill one Dabo man," was all he said, with that same stubborn *pay back* reasoning.

Knight pursed his lips and put on his sun helmet. He felt weary of Tulotu's sullenness—even a little angry. There seemed no way out but to trust to chance, the chance that the sergeant would not forget his Constabulary training.

The D. O. went out through the screened door, squinting against the glare of white dust on the path leading up the slope to Hower's place.

KNIGHT could not shake off his morose feeling. He felt impatient. As he came through the grove at the side of the trader's house, he tried to forget about Tulotu. Right now he had to settle the Baba killing.

He found Hower squeezed tight in a wicker chair under the shade of a pandanus tree. The burly man's belt gun jutted awkwardly at his side, while in his hand he was holding a square of black velvet with three large rosen-tinted pearls of full roundness gleaming in the bright morning light.

Knight took off his sun helmet and wiped the sweat off the band. "Excellent pearls," he remarked.

Hower scowled a greeting and continued

to examine the gleaming gems. "What brings you?" he asked without looking up. "I'm arresting you," Knight said evenly, "for the murder of Baba."

The trader's eyes narrowed and for an instant his fingers paused in the act of stroking the pearls. Then his big hairy hand closed around the velvet folds; he pocketed the gems.

"You're a fool," he said as he got to his feet and reached to his right side to pull the holstered revolver into sight. "You know you can't prove that killing. And what's one Moki more or less up here? Baba was a thief—always stealing pearls from Van, and—"

"And you killed him," Knight cut in dryly, "in order to get those same stolen pearls." He paused and eyed the big man before him; he wasn't sure Hower would take this without violence. "I'm taking you to Kikori—you're too much for this district, Hower. Let the R. M. handle the details."

"And I suppose you'll do your best to prove me guilty?"



"You guessed right."

There was a flash of anger in Hower's eyes. "You'll do better to keep your nose out of this," he warned.

Knight kept silent, and he could see the trader taking the silence to mean there was a chance to bargain.

"If you keep out of this," Hower said quickly, "I'll not forget it. I'll make it worth your while."

Knight had not expected this open defiance, this arrogance. A cunning denial, yes, for he himself was aware of the fact that Hower needed but to deny the charges and the R. M. would be forced to let him go free. Lack of evidence—a reprimand or warning by the R. M., and the trader would return to Manaketa.

Knight also thought of the Mokis, of their promise to *pay back*. Theirs was the simple way of all tribes—an eye for an eye, a killing had to be repaid with a killing. If white man failed to net out punishment then the Mokis themselves would do so. They'd *pay back* by killing any white man in Manaketa. Knight realized how badly he needed Sergeant Tulotu and the boys, yet Tulotu at this moment was planning to run off.

Hower's voice was grating in the D. O.'s ears. "Glad to see you realize your mistake, Knight. Let's talk this thing over."

Knight smiled. "You misunderstood. I'm taking you to Kikori. Ought to throw you in the jailhouse here, but I'm sure a Moki would put a spear through you. It'd be what you deserve, but I want the law to have you."

He watched Hower's gun hand; he didn't think the trader would dare shoot him down. He put on his helmet and straightened. "And because you had the face to think I'd want any part of your dirty ways, I'll send Sergeant Tulotu to make the official arrest." As he spoke, Knight thought of his own Webley hanging on the rack back in the office. He saw Hower's jaw tighten.

"This afternoon," Knight went on. "That'll give you time to get your things together. By way of warning, don't try any rough play. Tulotu will be armed, and he'll have orders to shoot if you—"

"Damn you, Knight!" the trader shouted. "Sending a native to arrest me!"

Knight was aware that he had promised Hower the worst possible humiliation. You don't send a native to arrest a white man, and he doubted that even a calloused cheat and killer like Hower would take it. But let him brew, Knight thought. Let him sweat. Let him think awhile of the jeering natives and the jeering of his own overseers.

The D. O. turned and started to walk

down the pathway. He heard Hower behind him and, not sure what to expect, he wheeled around. Hower was lunging wildly, reaching for his neck.

"Damn you, Knight! I'll show you—"

Knight warded off the big hands and pushed the man aside.

For an instant the burly trader stood frozen, his hard eyes burning hatred. He said, "You send your stinking sergeant, and I'll kill him!"

"The way you killed Baba?" Knight asked irritably.

"Yes, damn you! The way I killed Baba!"

The D. O. nodded. "Don't let a Moki hear you say that." He started to walk away. "Sergeant Tulotu will be around for you. Say about one o'clock."

As he headed toward the river, Knight couldn't recall a single instance where a native boy had arrested a white man. His own threat to Hower had been intended more for effect than anything else. Knight didn't question the obvious—Hower will resist the sergeant, and there will be trouble. For this reason, and also because he had enough of a problem with Tulotu's tribe in the hills, Knight knew he'd not send the sergeant to the trader's place. He'd make the arrest himself.

KNIGHT spent an hour at the river landing helping Smitty clean the launch, then went over to the shack to see if Jock had any recent wireless messages.

"No messages," Jock said and put the tea pot on the primus stove. "Tell me, Knight, what's doing with that killing? Expect the Mokis to make trouble?"

The D. O. shrugged. "Can't tell. Better keep your revolver on." After a pause, he added, "Should things go badly, don't let those devils take you alive."

Jock pretended not to hear as he went on preparing the tea.

Knight waited for his cup to be filled. He was turning over in his mind the Baba killing, wondering how wisely he had handled the whole mess. Then he thought of the patrol up to the Dabos to see about that head. Tulotu wouldn't like that—

Just as Knight lifted the cup to his mouth, the sharp retort of a shot crashed across the clearing. He stood up.

Jock finished pouring his own tea, then reached for his revolver belt. "Who do you suppose is shooting?" he asked in a forced, calm tone.

Knight frowned and put down his cup. "Tulotu might be showing the boys how to load a rifle." He knew this wasn't true; the keys to the rifle box were in his own pocket. His own Webley hung on the rack in his office, but he was certain the sergeant would not dare handle that gun. Unless—

Another shot crashed.

Knight rushed out of the shack and started running up the path, with Jock close behind him. His thoughts came swiftly, angrily. Were the Mokis fools? Had they sent some spearmen into Manaketa? Was Tulotu firing those shots as a warning?

All the Constabulary boys were in the clearing, and every one of them was crowding around the big sergeant, while on the far side the traders and their overseers stood numbly by.

"Tulotu! What the devil's going on?"

Before the sullen sergeant could answer the D. O., one of the boys yelled, "Mist' Hower run to jungle! Mist' Hower shoot Tulotu and run to jungle!"

Knight approached closer. Tulotu was gripping his left arm above the elbow where blood trickled between his fingers. "What happened?" Knight demanded.

The sergeant glared toward the jungle. "Tulotu go to Mist' Hower house and find Baba neckpiece," he said. "Mist' Hower find Tulotu and shoot 'um. Tulotu run here. Mist' Hower run to jungle. Me send Lobo to watch which way him go." Grunting that that was all there was to the story, the sergeant held out his bloody hand holding a piece of rolled bark carved with typical native Moki figures, with the dangling string loop to fit around a man's neck.

Taking the neckpiece, Knight noticed that the rolled bark was plugged with rags on one end but that the other end had been pried open. Baba had evidently kept his stolen pearls in this neckpiece; Hower had taken it off the dead native, pried it open, and discovered the pearls. But how Tulotu ever sensed that the trader might be in possession of it was too involved a matter for Knight to reason out. The neckpiece, however, would be enough to prove Hower guilty.

Knight turned to Jock. "Will you fix Tulotu's arm? There's a first aid kit in the barracks."

Then he went to the office and strapped on his revolver under his coat. At the moment he wanted only to strike out for the jungle and get Hower back, but he warned himself to proceed cautiously. Hower was a good jungle man.

Jock was just finishing the last knot in Tulotu's bandage when Knight came into the barracks. They waited in silence for Corporal Lobo to return. His report was short. Trader Hower was heading up-river.

"Why would he go up-river?" Jock asked.

"I don't know," Knight replied irritably.

He knew there was danger in the situation. His Constabulary boys were talking among themselves—they were eager to turn this into a personal issue with Hower. And Sergeant Tulotu now had plenty of reason to chuck off all his training and bolt for his village. Knight recalled the R. M.'s advice, and scowled. "Put your trust in Sergeant Tulotu—"

"Lobo," he called to the corporal, "get two boys. We'll go up-river to catch Trader Hower."

This time, Knight told himself, he must show a tough hand, the kind Manaketa needed. And he must act quickly.

Lobo called two of the men, but then Sergeant Tulotu pushed to the front to stand squarely before the D. O.

"That be too many men on track," Tulotu said. "Make plenty noise for Mist' Hower to hear. Him plenty good jungle man—hard catch 'um mebbe. Tulotu go 'long Mist' Knight and Lobo—then mebbe catch Mist' Hower."

Knight frowned at the sudden offer of help from the sergeant who had every reason to run out on him. There was that Goraina head in his village, and the D. O. knew how badly Tulotu wanted to get there ahead of a patrol to warn his brother and the others. And here Hower had wounded the sergeant over a Moki killing. Up-river meant Moki territory, and Knight knew how stealthily a native could vanish in the grass plains or in the jungle.

The sergeant grunted again to attract the D. O.'s attention. "Tulotu go 'long Mist' Knight," he said, almost angrily.

There was no time to weigh the matter.

Knight turned to Jock. "How's his arm?"

Jock raised his brows. "You know you can't hurt a Dabo man. Unless the bleeding starts up again, he'll be all right."

Knight listened absently. He must take Tulotu with him. Creating further ill feeling would be dangerous. At the same time he tried to understand why Hower had run toward Moki territory; what the trader should have done, Knight reasoned, was go down-river to Dasau where he could find someone to sail him to one of the Arafura islands, even to Australia.

Jock was talking. "You're a fool, Knight. Going into Moki country. If those savages get hold of you—of any white man—"

"Nonsense," Knight said. "The Mokis know me."

The other laughed dryly. "That'll be rich when your head pays for Baba's killing. Why not just send your report to the R. M. and—"

Knight smiled. "And what'll I tell the Mokis?"

Jock raised his brows. "Well, I can't stop you. Go on, go get your head lopped off."

Knight tapped the man's shoulder. "Thanks for worrying over me." He turned to the sergeant. "All right, Tulotu. You and Corporal Lobo come with me to catch Trader Hower."

They went back to the office, where Knight unlocked the long box and handed each man a rifle. Both men then went to the veranda and waited for him while he carefully recorded on his report sheet the shooting incident. Outside, Knight said to the sergeant, "Tulotu, you lead the way."

BY LATE afternoon they came out of the gloomy jungle onto the sunny head-high *kunai* grass plains. In the lead, Sergeant Tulotu halted and stood rock-still for a full minute, his native senses finely tuned to the gentle breeze. Nothing moved out there in the grass, except the lazy swaying crests. This was Moki country. The river was somewhere to the left, with rain forests and more jungle visible in the purple distance where the Dabo hill tribes, Tulotu's tribe, lived.

Knight felt uneasy. The long trek up the jungle foot-path might have given Tulotu too much time to think. The D. O. glanced at the sergeant. Tulotu was watching a lone bird of copper-colored plumage flapping

straight up into the air. The bird swooped away in a graceful flight after its first nervous flutter.

Tulotu turned slowly and pointed to the right. "Mist' Hower sure come this way not 'long jungle," he said. "Mist' Hower go 'long that way." The sergeant grunted, and for the first time that day his bland face twisted into an expression. He looked baffled—baffled by his own reading of the invisible signs around them.

Knight didn't like the looks of things, nor the uneasy feeling inside himself. Why would Hower, a good jungle man, keep to the grass plain where his pursuers could easily trail him? Why would he go deeper into Moki country instead of trying to reach the river and Dasau?

Tulotu shouldered his rifle. "We go now."

Corporal Lobo looked up, said, "Eve'ything too quiet. Is bad sign. Mebbe Mokis make black magic."

Tulotu's answer, in native talk, was too fast for the D. O. to understand, but there was anger in the sergeant's voice and it caused the corporal to step back.



Knight didn't like it. Was the sergeant purposely steering toward the Mokis? Was this some strange kind of revenge? Knight's instinctive reaction was to give the order to return down the trail to Manaketa, but he realized that such an act would neither get Hower nor would he stand respected by his Constabulary boys. Yet out here in the *kunai* grass, flanked by the jungle, Tulotu held the upper hand.

The D. O. pulled his Webley to the front and unbuckled the holster flap.

"Tulotu," he called.

The sergeant turned to face him, and for a long time Knight looked at the sullen face and clouded eyes. Then he asked, "Why do you lead us to Moki country?"

Before Tulotu could answer, a high-pitched cry sounded in the distance. The echo died away, then the cry repeated.

The three men stood on the path and listened. Knight looked questioningly at Lobo, but the corporal kept his eyes averted. Tulotu took a few steps toward the jungle, then stopped and cocked his head.

Knight knew the cries were tribal bush signals, and he knew they came from Mokis. He also knew what the outcome would be if Mokis found him, a white man, alone out here in their country.

Again a series of cries echoed, sounding much like the yelping of wild animals.

Knight stepped up to the sergeant. "Why do you lead us to Mokis?" he asked sternly.

Tulotu pointed to the right of the footpath where the maze of grass stalks lay broken. He made his way in, and Knight and Lobo followed him. They didn't walk far and the sergeant came to a halt.

"Mist' Hower come 'long this way," Tulotu said in a low tone. "Him go back-ways, like afraid dog." He stood in thought and screwed his face, showing that he did not fully understand the signs he had read. "Toulou no und'stand," he admitted at last.

The distant cries were now nearer. Knight knew that those Mokis were trailing someone, stalking a man! A white man! Mokis bent on paying back for the killing of Baba!

Knight cursed himself for a fool for following Tulotu this far. And now the sergeant was leading the way deeper toward the edge of the jungle.

Lobo started to walk hesitatingly, not certain if he was to follow the sergeant or stay with the D. O.

"Tulotu."

The sergeant held up his palm in a sign of silence.

Knight tried hard to control his temper. One thing he'd do was set the sergeant straight. "Tulotu," he said as he pushed his way through the grass, "you know your brother and other Dabo men raided the Goraina and killed one of their tribe. You

know they got man's head in village. You know we go on patrol and punish your tribe."

Tulotu's eyes now clouded darker. "Befo' that time the Goraina kill one of my people," he retorted.

"So it happened. But Mister Cortell punished the Goraina. He burned one house and destroyed one garden. You must understand this now. You and I must punish your brother and other men in your village—we must *pay back*."

Tulotu sullenly looked away.

"Do you understand me, Tulotu? You lead us now out of Moki country."

THIS sergeant remained silent, sullen. In the high grass surrounding them, the Mokis again exchanged their bush signals and Tulotu cocked his head to listen. The D. O.'s trained ears caught the pad of running bare feet. Nearby something swished through the grass and struck the sun-parched ground, as if a thrown object had fallen. And then every sound died—

Knight slowly moved his hand for the revolver, but Tulotu reached out and grabbed his arm.

"Make no noise, Mist' Knight," the sergeant whispered. "Stay 'long here; Tulotu go this way, then come back."

Before the D. O. could stop him, Tulotu slipped off his cartridge belt and placed it over the rifle on the ground, then stealthily moved into the *kunai* grass, out of sight.

Knight gritted his teeth. He couldn't call the sergeant back. Any loud talking, any noise, would surely attract the revenge-bent Mokis.

He listened for the wing-flap of a bird, but there was none. Nothing but the heavy, deadly silence of the sun-bleached plain, of Mokis waiting for the tell-tale sound to lead them to a white man.

And then Knight understood what had happened when that object swished through the grass and fell near them. It was all a game of death, played against him by Ben Hower. Hower had led the Mokis this far, and, by throwing some dry jungle mud to the right spot, was showing them where to find a white man's head. If the Mokis found him, the D. O. of Manaketa, that would give Hower a chance to reach Dasau and a safe passage to some Arafura island.

Knight turned to Corporal Lobo. The native was squatting with his rifle across his bare knees, his big eyes looking at the D. O.

Knight crouched low and pulled the Webley out. The heavy gun felt good in his sweating hand, but at the same time he felt sick and empty inside. Tulotu had made a fool of him!

From all sides the sound of running feet and wild cries came nearer and nearer.

Knight tried to peer through the thick grass sea. He gave it up as futile. He tried not to move too much. He wondered what he and Lobo would do if those howling Mokis found them. Overhead the sky was a deep blue; under his boots the dry grass rustled with the slightest move he made; his throat felt dry, parched.

He thought his burning eyes were playing tricks on him when he glimpsed the black bony legs with white feathered bands. He heard the panting native, he saw him. There in the maze of grass, he saw the cassowary-tipped spear held tightly in the man's hand. The Moki whooped his signal, then ran ahead.

Knight took a deep breath. But from other directions more Mokis were unfailingly converging to this area, their jungle senses guiding them to a white man.

Cold sweat trickled down Knight's burning face. Less than eight yards from him three Mokis were coming through the grass. The bush signals came fast and furious. Yelps, shouts, and eerie chanting. *Pay back! Pay back!*

KNIGHT leveled his revolver and waited for the three Mokis to find him. He absently wondered if the next D. O. of Manaketa would pay back Tulotu for his desertion in the face of danger.

Realizing that his one chance for escape was the jungle, Knight made his plan. If he made a run for it, he might reach the protection of a tree where he could put up a fight. In the jungle he might hold them off—might kill a few before their spears pierced his chest. If he made a dash at exactly the right moment—

He looked at Lobo and wondered if the corporal would follow him. Maybe the Mokis will kill them both before they ever left this spot, but it was better than crouching here like a trapped animal.

He was ready to rise when the cries and chants suddenly increased in tempo. It was the sound of a thousand devils screaming at one another, and yet all around the grass plain and the jungle seemed to stand tensed, waiting to see what would happen.

Lobo grabbed the D. O.'s arm and pulled him down.

The sounds were strangely changing in direction. Instead of converging to this place, where Hower's thrown mud had lured and guided them, Knight realized that the Mokis were heading toward the jungle's edge. They were moving away, as if someone was guiding them now toward Hower's hiding place.

From the jungle a man screamed. Startled, Knight looked up. It was not the frenzied scream of a Moki calling his bush signals, but the terrible crying call of a white man who knows he is about to die.

One shot crashed. Then the ear-shattering whooping and chanting of the Mokis became an incessant thunder, now a tone easier, now saying the Mokis had trapped their victim.

Knight stood up. There was nothing he could do. Hower had got one shot in before the Moki spears got him.

The jungle started to live again. A bird's wings flapped above the swaying crests, and the Moki chant faded away in the distance. The Baba killing had been paid for.

KNIGHT picked up Tulotu's rifle and cartridge belt, then motioned to Corporal Lobo to lead the way toward the river track. As the corporal circled around a bulldog ant hill, he stopped to listen for footsteps coming behind them.

Sergeant Tulotu pushed aside the head-high grass to emerge alongside the D. O. The broad black face was still expressionless, the eyes cloudy-looking.

Lobo grinned, showing his big white teeth. "Tulotu fix 'um Mist' Hower good."

"We go back Manaketa now," the sergeant said sullenly.

Knight pursed his lips as he handed him the rifle and belt, then holstered his own

Webley. Without saying a word, Tulotu started walking down the path.

Knight didn't expect Tulotu to explain what had happened. He knew now that the sergeant had, for a brief moment which spelled the difference of life or death for his D. O., reached for the only weapon he knew—his own inborn primitive jungle ability. He had led the Mokis off one trial, to put them on the trail of Ben Hower.

Knight pushed his stride to walk beside Tulotu. He knew of no way to thank the sergeant for saving his life. This one killing was settled, in a way, but there was still the Goraina head in Tulotu's village. Knight sighed. He must keep a tough hand over Manaketa. He must.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we go on patrol to your village, Tulotu."

The sergeant grunted.

"This time," Knight went on, a feeling of weariness weighing down every word he said, "we don't burn houses and we don't destroy gardens."

Tulotu turned his head to look at him. "Do what then?"

"This time," Knight said, "we bring some of your men to Manaketa, and we teach them that *pay back* is no good way. I think that be better than old kind punishment. When they learn lesson, they go back to village."

In the mangrove swamp a hornbill called and deeper in the jungle frogs croaked. Knight saw Tulotu's eyes gleam for a moment.

"That be good way," Tulotu said slowly. He seemed to be thinking it over, then again said, "That be plenty good way, Mist' Knight."

For the first time in two months the D. O. felt relieved.

He'll have to write a report to the R. M. It will be difficult, he told himself, but he knew he'd write it.

Overhead the creepers and lush trees of the jungle roof hid the darkening sky. Knight knew they'd reach Manaketa before midnight, for Tulotu now seemed to walk with a light step.

MEN who wouldn't DIE!

by George C. Appel

The Swingaway

OLD MAN GOMEZ ran Venezuela with a whiplash and an iron boot and racks of well-oiled weapons. He'd come out of the Andes—a *jivaro*—and the Indian was still deep in him after he took power. He wasn't content to kill you off, if you bucked him; he had to rub you out slowly, horribly. And so it was with Vicente Martinez, itinerant Carib who ran afoul of the dictator's mesh in a try at the throne. Vicente was brave, he had followers, they had money. But courage alone does not win revolts, and followers melt with the sun. There wasn't enough money.



HUMISTON

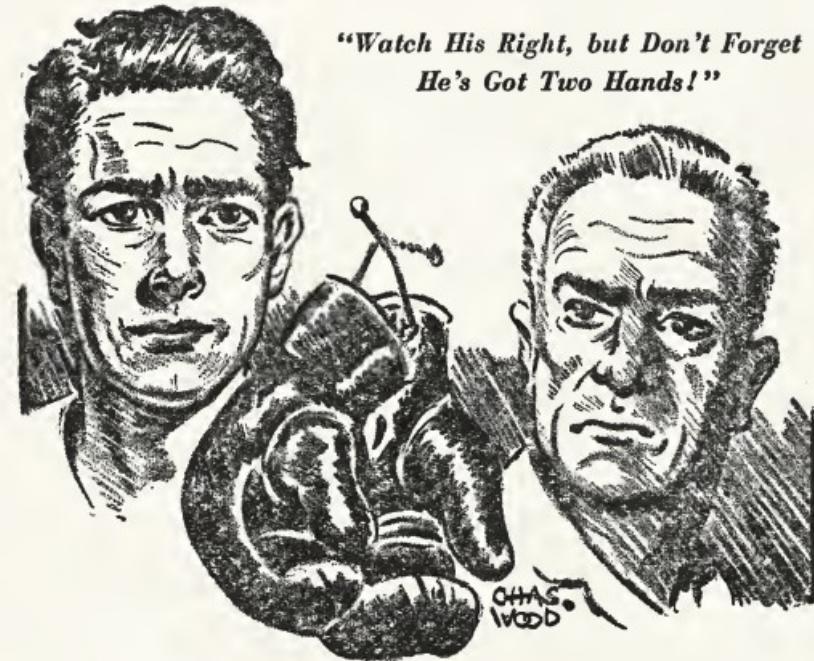
First, then, the meat hook. They hung Vicente by his scrotum on a meat hook and let him swing slowly from pain-shot flesh while flames of agony sent insanity to his brain. And they spat on him and adopted an English word, "Swingaway." Try to move in on The Benefactor, hey? Pull a revolution, no? "We'll hang you by the other end, come awhile. By the neck." Vicente gasped curses through the blood-drool and called on his God to send salvation.

It came momentarily, when they unhooked him in order to hang him. They hung him first by ear-hooks and pasted honey on him so the killer ants would crawl up and dine for a while. . . . "Call your God, *stupido*. The Benefactor is greater. . . ." The ants came, and Vicente blotted from feeble lungs and vowed they'd never kill him: "My God is greater."

The *chicitos* in the plaza saw all this, and the Church was deep in them, as the Indian was in Gomez. So when in a moment of idle jest a *teniente* put a Mauser slug through Vicente's belly, two *chicitos* rebelled in their souls. And that night, they shinnied the gallows and cut away cartilage and lowered Vicente to the ground. By dawning, when the pigeons should have been bleaching the body with their passing, there were but two clotted hooks, hanging empty. . . .

Where did they take Vicente Martinez, itinerant Carib? *Quien sabe?* they'll shrug today. Somewhere into the tangle of the hills, where a man can face the greater God, no longer able to face his fellow-men.

*"Watch His Right, but Don't Forget
He's Got Two Hands!"*



THE KID'S FIRST FIGHT

By JACK KARNEY

ON WINGED feet Joey took the steps up to the third-floor landing, pushed open the door of the apartment. His mother was rinsing a coffee cup and saucer at the sink.

"Joey?" she turned, squinting in the semi-darkness.

"I won, Ma," Joey tried to be nonchalant but the elation came up out of him in a surging wave. "Knocked him out in the second round. And look what I got!"

She came forward, soft brown eyes searching his face, noting the bruised lip, the red spot under the left eye.

"Oh, Joey, after what Dad said—"

The smile was gone. "I couldn't help it, Ma. See the watch. Gold. Seventeen jewels. It says so in the inside."

"It is pretty." For a second pride shone in her bony face, then she glanced at the closed bedroom door and suddenly lost all trace of expression. "You promised you'd stay away from fight clubs."

He lifted his shoulders, his eyes disturbed. "I couldn't help it, Ma. There was an opening in the card and this man asked who wants to fill in and before I knew it, I said okay."

She fingered the pocket watch, replaced it in the plush box, wiped dry fingers on the soiled smock, then wiped them again.

Joey said, "Maybe if I gave the watch to Dad, he wouldn't be sore, huh, Ma?"

Before she could answer the bedroom door opened and a short, stockily built man came out, the worn bathrobe snug around his shoulders. On the back of the robe the

faded red lettering spelled out, MIKE RIVERS. Scar tissue was heavy around his eyes. His right ear was a shriveled piece of flesh with a tiny hole. His nose was broken and spread unevenly over a punch-marked face. Standing in the doorway, Mike Rivers looked down at the watch in Joey's hand. There was a slow hardening to his lips as he walked into the kitchen.

Uncertainty in his manner, Joey shifted the watch to the other hand, looked at his mother for aid and comfort which was not forthcoming.

Joey said, the words spilling, "A watch, Dad, for you, I won it for you, Dad, here."

Mike Rivers' voice was tight, the words thin and sharp. "I asked you not to dirty yourself, but you didn't listen."

"But, Dad, it was only an amateur fight. It was fun, honest."

"Amateurs. Fun. Gold watches when you win; dollar fountain pens for a beating. Then one more step to the professionals, nickels and dimes to act as somebody's punching bag."

JOEY stared at his father. He knew there were words he'd left unsaid. I've given my life to boxing, his father forgot to say, I had no time to learn anything else. Seventeen years of it and look at me now, a washed up bum, a handler, trainer, a lobby-gow for fighters, anything to make a dollar to support the family.

Joey blurted out, "I like it, Dad. I like to put on the gloves and dance around and box with the fellers. I can't help it."

Mike Rivers' eyes narrowed. He said, clearly and swiftly, "I've asked you to listen to an older man who's been around but you got your own damn ideas. This time I'm not asking you. I'm ordering you never to lace on a glove. If you do—" His face muscles twitched.

Joey looked at him in fear and resentment. "Remember once you told me how you liked the feel of the canvas under your feet, the ropes rubbing against your back, the smell of the gym, the alcohol, the sweat, everything. That's how I feel, Dad. I don't know why—"

"Stay away from the gym!"

His cheeks a dull, smoldering red, Joey turned away. "I'll try, Dad. Honest to God, I'll try." Then he remembered the

watch, held it out. "For you, Dad, a present."

An angry spasm ran across the older man's face as he threw up his hands to push away Joey's hand. "I don't want it," he cried. The watch dropped out of the case to the bare floor, pieces of tinkling crystal scattered around it.

Joey stared down. Nobody spoke and the silence grew heavy. Abruptly Joey turned and went into his room, closing the door softly behind him.

His mother picked up the watch carefully, almost reverently. Mike Rivers drew a hand across his forehead in a tired gesture.

"I told him I didn't want it," he cried in self-defense. "Needn't look at me like that. Get it fixed. I'll give you the money for it. But you needn't tell Joey—" He went into his bedroom and she stared at the closed door, a troubled look on her thin face.

JOEY held Anne's hand as they walked along the waterfront and watched the seagulls swooping down to the river, their wings glistening silver in the setting sun. Anne was seventeen, one year younger than Joey, and just reached Joey's shoulder. Not pretty, she had candid blue eyes, and a softly rounded face that looked lost in the maze of red hair hanging around her shoulders.

They sat down in a stringpiece and watched the gang do tricks off the freight cars.

The leader did a swan dive and everyone followed, then they raced across the oil-stained water to the adjoining pier.

Joey looked across the river at the New York skyline.

She said, "Bet a penny I know what you are thinking about."

He pulled his eyes around, grinned. "Bet."

She said, "Madison Square Garden."

He laughed softly, "You know the words have a nice sound, like music or poetry. Madison Square Garden." He rolled the name around his tongue, enjoying it. "They got a big marquee out front, big bright lights you can see a mile away. Wouldn't it be funny if we walked past some day and saw Joey Rivers name up there?"

"You're not serious, Joey?"

"No," he said quickly. "Just make believe."

A tiny frown appeared between her pencilled eyebrows. "Suppose we just don't talk about it, Joey."

"Talking can't hurt."

"Maybe not. Joey, you've got a job to worry about—"

"Sixteen bucks a week," he said, no bitterness in his tone.

"My Dad says you'll get a raise soon."

He studied his palms. "What else does your father say?"

She flared up. "I don't know why you take that attitude, as if my Dad disliked you or something."

He grinned. "Or something."

She said, "Dad likes you. He said someday you'll be behind the counter with him instead of running errands. Maybe, someday, you'll be a partner in the business. My Dad said so, Joey."

He said sadly, "Why, because I'm Joey Rivers or because you and I will be married some day?"

"What's the difference? With Dad behind you, you've got a future. More of a future than in this prizefighting you're always talking about."

Anne's Dad had used the same words. "You're fool, son. There's no future in prizefighting. You should learn a lesson from your father—"

THIS swimmers came up on the pier, hopping around on one foot, then the other to get the water out of their ears. They said hello to Joey and Anne, milled around them.

They said, "When you boxin' again, Joey, huh? When you fightin' pro's? Two pro fights Blackie's won."

Blackie Martino came out of the water last. He blew his nose, shook water from his ears. Blackie, runner-up in the Golden Gloves, had won his two professional fights by knockouts. He saw Joey sitting with Anne and he scowled. Blackie was always scowling. As far back as Joey could remember, Blackie had made those funny faces.

Joey said, "I'm not boxin' any more, fellers. I'm retiring undefeated."

Blackie said, "Look a' him. One lousy amachoof fight. Maybe you're better off,

Joey. Chances are you'd wind up like your old man, listenin' to the bells in y' head."

Joey got up. "Blackie Martino, always shootin' off his big trap."

Blackie said easily, "A punchdrunk bum, that's your old man—"

Joey cried out something, moved in on Blackie who stepped back. Blackie said, "I get paid f' my fights. I ain't breakin' no knuckles on your head."

Anne grasped Joey's arm. "Please, Joey, Don't pay any attention to that loud mouth. Joey, please."

He sat down again, hot and shaken. "He can't talk about my father like that."

Blackie winked at the gang and the boys laughed. Blackie said, "Joey, maybe y' can take it out of my hide. Tomorrow in the gym you and me can slug it out with gloves. Okay? Or maybe you just talk tough?"

Miserable indecision held his tongue. He'd promised his Dad—

Anne said, "Don't pay any attention to him, Joey. Let's go home."

Blackie said, "No guts, eh?"

His eyes were bright, nostrils quivering. "Okay, tomorrow in the gym."

IT WAS Sunday afternoon and Wally's gym was crowded with boxers, their managers and trainers, with spectators who had paid thirty-five cents at the door for the privilege of watching the past, present and future greats go through their training chores.

After waiting their turn, blackie Martino and Joey climbed into the ring. The crowd moved to the other ring where the latest importation from England, a middle-weight scheduled to fight the champ in September, was slipping his bandaged hands into twelve-ounce gloves.

Joey watched a handler cover Martino's face thickly with vaseline, slip the mouth-piece between his lips. Joey moved around impatiently in his sneakers, rolled his shoulders, shadow-boxed a few seconds.

At the bell Martino ripped into Joey's middle with ten-ounce gloves, forced him to grab and hold. In a clinch Martino roughed Joey around the ring, punished him inside, sent Joey sprawling with a leather bombardment. Near the end of the round Joey caught Martino going away and Blackie slipped to one knee. The crowd broke and

the boys had taken away half the Englishman's audience.

Joey tried to keep Martino off with a stiff left but the swarthy-faced Golden Glover came under it, threw punches from every angle. Then suddenly Joey was tired. His back against the ropes he tried to fight back but lead weights held his hands down, bands pressed around his chest, stopping his breathing. When the round ended Joey was slowly sinking to the canvas.

Blackie said, "One more round, Joey. C'mon, I'll take it easy."

Joey breathed deeply, shook his head. He hadn't done any training; he wasn't in condition.

Blackie taunted him. "Quittin', Joey?"

A low, dead voice said from ringside. "Joey's had enough. Get out of there, Joey."

Joey's stomach tightened into a sickening knot. He shook off the gloves, climbed out of the ring. His eyes met his father's, slanted off.

Mike Rivers said, a sudden edge to his voice, "You and your promises."

Joey drew his mouth down across his teeth, not answering.

Mike Rivers cried, "I'm talking to you."

Compelled by the roughness in his father's voice, Joey turned, faced him squarely. Joey said, "I had to fight him, Dad." He drew his fist across his lips and it came away red. "I couldn't back out."

Mike Rivers said, "It's been a long time since I licked you. Tonight I'm either gonna make you listen to me or—" he stopped.

Joey began to move away in a half-daze. Suddenly he turned, his chin sticking out stubbornly. "Better make the licking a good one because what I said about never putting on gloves again don't count. Up there in that ring I made my mind up, I'm gonna fight in the pro's."

"I'll beat that out of you."

"It'll take a lot of beating, Dad."

"Get dressed and go home!"

Joey went into the dressing room, removed his strips, stretched out on the table to rest. After a while, a tall gray-haired man came in. Joey knew Whitey Davis, who'd handled Mike Rivers and was now scheduled to be in the Champ's corner in September.

"Hi, kid," Whitey said, grinning.

"Blackie give you a nice workout?" He leaned over to examine the bruises on Joey's face. "You'll be okay. What you wanna go into the ring with Blackie for? For that matter, why monkey around with gloves at all? Take it from me, kid, I've been around here a long time and a smart kid like you don't belong in this lousy racket."

Joey said, "Mike send you to give me that spiel?"

Whitey shook his head. "It was my own idea."

"Whitey, I wanna be a great fighter, a champ, maybe. Is that a crime?"

WHITEY stared down into the boy's eyes. He could see the fire in the eyes, the fever that was pushing this boy on with the business of acquiring greatness.

Whitey said, "Look, Joey, thousands of kids like yourself become fighters, each with the bug in his noodle that he'll be a Champ. Only there ain't enough crowns to satisfy everybody. Only a handful get up on top. Why? Because they got the stuff? Maybe. Or maybe it's because they got good managers who know the ropes, managers with good connections. Guess I'm talking to myself. Go take your shower, kid, you'll catch cold."

Whitey paced the floor and when Joey came out, a towel draped over his shoulders, he'd decided on a new course of action. "Kid, you was right the first time. Your old man sent me in to maybe talk you out of it. He's a great guy, your old man, the nicest guy in the world. You're his kid and it's for your own good—"

"I know all that," Joey said, then grinning, "What you gonna do with a dumb kid who doesn't know the score?"

Whitey shrugged with his hands and shoulders. "That's how it is, I guess. What about your job?"

"As soon as I get my first fight, I start training and to hell with the job."

Whitey went outside to where Mike Rivers was helping a young colored boy go through his calisthenics.

Whitey said, "No use, Mike. Hell, why not let the kid fight?"

Anger in his face, Mike Rivers said, "Sure I'll let him fight. Why not?"

The river looked crinkled in the moonlight. The sky was a tranquil limpid

blue. Anne and Joey sat on the stringpiece listening to the pleasant drones of sound made by a tugboat maneuvering a freighter between piers.

Anne said, "It's late, Joey, I'd better go home."

An echo of bitterness under his tone, he said, "Before your father comes looking for you with the whip."

"That isn't fair." She tossed her head angrily. "My father isn't entirely wrong, you know. You can't just throw up your job and expect—"

"I did; that's that."

"You'll never be anybody, my father said. Flittering your time away in the gym. Maybe he's right."

He faced her squarely, trying desperately to conceal the turmoil going on inside him. "Tomorrow night, I box my first pro fight. I'll win it. I know I will. That's all I need, this one fight under my belt, and I'm on my way. Anne, change your mind, come see me box tomorrow night. I've got a ticket for you—"

She drew her eyes away. "I told you; my Dad ordered me not to go."

His face looked wan and drawn. "He's good with them orders."

"He also ordered me not to see you again."

"And?"

She didn't answer for a while then her eyes swept his face. "I couldn't do that, Joey. I love you too much." Then she was sobbing softly.

A STRAY dog sniffed at his shoes and limped away. A gang of boys, singing camp songs, came onto the pier and found seats in the corner near the heavy pilings.

Joey took a black rubber ball out of his pocket, squeezed it, abruptly flung it so far out into the darkness he didn't hear the splash.

"Don't be angry with me, Joey," she pleaded.

He shook his head. "It isn't you. Just that everybody and everything keeps slapping me down. You can't do what you wanna do, they say, we won't let you."

She took his hand in hers. A kind of radiance shone in her face. "You'll win tomorrow, Joey. You'll show them. I'll pray for you, Joey." She leaned forward,

kissed him. Before he could put his arms around her, she was gone.

JOEY took one last look around to see if he had all his stuff for the fight, snapped shut the battered valise and came out into the kitchen. His father looked up, stared at him with the impersonal eyes of a stranger, turned back to his newspaper spread before him on the table.

His mother came away from the sink, smiled weakly. "You're going, Joey."

"Yeh, Ma. It's getting kind of late."

"I'll get my hat and go with you."

Mike Rivers' head came around in a slow stiff turn. Coldly, he said, "You're not going any place."

"Joey needs someone," she began.

Joey said quickly, "It's okay, Ma. You don't have to worry about me." He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "I'll do all right. Heck, if I knew you were there I'd be thinking about you and I couldn't fight my fight."

"You're sure, Joey—"

"Sure. Wish me luck, Ma."

She kissed his cheek, and without looking at his father, he went out, the patched valise knocking against the closing door.

Eyes cold and lusterless, she said, "Mike, you should be with him."

The newspaper rustled.

"Why didn't you go with him?"

A muscle quivered in his throat but he said nothing.

"Remember your first fight, Mike? I was the only one there who knew you. You told me how my presence alone gave you the necessary lift to win."

He crushed the newspaper, flung it aside. His lips looked dry and there was a sickness in his eyes.

"I wish to God you hadn't been there. I wish I'd lost and quit. Then maybe today I'd be somebody with a decent job. Joey isn't going to wind up like me. Tonight he'll see what it feels like to take a beating from a professional fighter. Blackie Martino will knock some sense into him."

"Blackie Martino? Is that who? But Blackie's won his last two fights; he's had years of experience in the amateurs."

The words jumped from his mouth, impatient, staccato. "That's why I had Whitey match Martino with Joey; he'll get such a

beating all the fight will be knocked out of him and he'll quit."

"Mike, you couldn't—"

"It's for his own good. Damn it, you think I'm enjoying this?"

He turned on his heel and went into his bedroom. She followed and found him sitting on the bed, his head in his hands.

"Mike," she said softly, "go to him, help him."

"It's no good," he said wearily, "one beating and he'll quit. It's got to be that way."

A sob escaped her lips. "Joey'll never quit."

He looked up. "He's got to, he's got to get out of this stinking racket."

"Joey is you, Mike, the same blood, the same instinct to fight and fight—"

"No." Sweat dampened his forehead.

"Yes, Mike." Relentlessly, she said, "You wouldn't quit, win or lose. Joey is like that. In your heart you know it." She saw the vague fears in his eyes rolling into sober conviction. She said, "You say you don't want Joey to wind up like you. But he will, because, like you, he's got nobody to help him over the rough spots, nobody to advise him. Look in the mirror, Mike, and see how Joey'll look in fifteen years."

"No! God help him, no!"

"Yes, Mike. What are you going to do about it?"

He got up on shaky legs. "Gotta walk," he said. "I can't think straight."

JOEY smiled stiffly as he walked down the aisle, the flapping of the faded robe against his legs pacing the pounding inside him. He looked at the spectators lounging lazily in their seats and he felt heavy and clumsy, scared. The lower strand tripped him and somebody at ringside laughed.

Scuffing his sneakers through the rosin he noted the mass of empty seats. Around the third bout of the evening the seats would be full, Joey knew. Why waste time watching a couple of prelim kids when the fans could have a more enjoyable time out in the lobby chewing the fat, puffing black smoke into the other guy's face? His father used to tell him about the real fan up in the balcony. Thinking of his father brought a pang to his heart. Suddenly he felt chilled.

Whitey said, "You'll be okay, kid. Dempsey, Tunney, they used to get the heebie-jeebies before a fight."

Joey smiled gratefully.

The gong clamored for silence but the noise continued. The sing-song voice of the announcer informed the crowd of the name, weight and the district of each boxer in the opening four round contest of the evening. There was applause and a couple whistles from up in the balcony. Some of the gang, Joey thought.

"C'mon, kid," Whitey said and they went to the center of the ring under the heavy lights to listen to the referee's instructions. Joey tried to concentrate but Blackie Martino's smugly smiling face distracted him. Back in his corner, Joey slipped out of the robe.

One last word of encouragement by Whitey, then the gong, loud and clear.

Martino met Joey in the center of the ring and without any loss of time, pumped both hands to the head. Joey lashed back, missed, caught a left and right to the head that forced him to grab and hold desperately. There was a singing in his head and already he felt tired. Weeks of preparation in the gym and it took just a few solid punches to drain all the energy out of him. Martino whispered in Joey's ear, silly, obscene words, then punished Joey inside with tricks he'd picked up in his comparatively long career.

Martino swarmed over him and the crowd, sensing a knockout, became interested. Joey fought back desperately but Martino was a perpetual motion machine, stopping only when the referee stepped between them. Martino hooked his left, crossed his right and Joey went down on one knee. Before the timekeeper could start his count Joey got up only to be dropped by a rain of blows. This time Joey saw Whitey's frantic signal to stay down. At eight Whitey lifted his palms. Joey got up, grateful for the second it took the referee to wipe the rosin from the gloves on his gray shirt. Martino rushed across the ring, feinted Joey out of position with a left, put all his weight behind a whistling right hand. Joey went down just as the bell rang.

Whitey worked on Joey, talked to him even while he massaged new life into the

fluttering muscles. Fresh cotton in his mouth, Joey went out for the second round.

They traded light taps in the center of the ring, then Martino came under fast, heaved leather to the body, switched his attack to the head. Joey went back on his heels, ugly lights dancing before his blurred eyes. Martino measured him, his right came thundering. Joey grasped the top strand to keep from falling. Martino cursed him, spit disgustedly, shuffled closer. In a sudden frenzy of new energy Joey sent him back with a wild bombardment. Martino laughed and the crowd laughed with him. Bobbing and weaving, Martino moved in, rocked Joey with a two-fisted attack. Joey went down with a dull thud.

At first he didn't hear anything except for that constant roar in his head, as if a train was going through the tunnel of his brain. His vision cleared and he saw the referee's hand slice the air before his eyes. He heard, six, seven, eight. He pulled himself up with the aid of the middle rope. Martino gave him no respite, pounding, pounding. In sheer desperation Joey struck back, connected. Martino stopped in his tracks, surprise etched in his swarthy face. Joey's legs were unsteady as he followed up, throwing brownish leather from every angle. Joey never saw the punch but suddenly he was down on his hands and knees and big red spots were soiling the canvas. He was there when the bell rang.

MIKE RIVERS stood in the rear of the arena, watching the fight. Sweat dotted his forehead, and his face was gray as ashes. At the end of the first round he'd gone half-way down the aisle. The kid needed help, his kid—he walked back. Just a couple more rounds, he'd thought, and it'll be over. He'll never quit, his wife had said, never, never, never.

His kid had stuff, lots of stuff for a beginner. He carried his left too low and he had a habit of throwing his right from the hip. His feet had music, good, strong feet, clear eyes. Guts, plenty of heart. C'mon, Joey, get under, work on the belly. The kid had a fair left, if only he'd put some weight behind it.

Mike Rivers rolled with every punch, winced as Joey went down. Stay down, Joey. Let's get it over with, down, Joey—

Damn fool—You can't win—Joey, you damn stubborn kid—

Suddenly Mike Rivers was going down the aisle, climbing up the stairs into the ring. Joey was leaning back on his stool, eyes closed, relaxing with utter weariness. Whitey was working on the cut over the left eye.

"Joey, listen to me."

Joey's eyes flew open. "Dad!" There was a curious ache in his throat. "I'm not doing so hot, huh, Dad."

"Let me do the talking. Stay away from Martino. Box him, you got the reach, watch his right hand; he's got to wind up before he throws it. He starts to wind up, let your left hook go with everything you got." He looked up impatiently at the warning whistle. "You got it straight? Stay out of clinches, don't let him wind up his right hand." He slapped Joey's shoulders just as the bell rang. "You can take that bum, Joey."

He sat on the steps and watched the fight. Look at the kid waltz around! C'mon, Joey, stick out that left. The kid had class written all over him. I used to look classy too and look what happened. But it isn't going to happen to my boy, not to Joey. I'll see to that. Once he's made his pile I'll make him quit. While he still has his health and brain. A vague uneasiness disturbed him. Suppose the kid, like Mike Rivers, couldn't quit the game until—until it was too late?

Joey, for the first time that night felt free and easy. Martino tried to work his way inside to explode his bombs but Joey kept him off balance with a straight left. Then Joey saw it; Martino made a peculiar motion with his right hand, let it go. Joey caught the glove on his arm. Martino said something. Joey laughed.

"C'mon, you bum," Joey said. "C'mon and fight."

He stepped in quickly, hooked his left just as Martino began to wind up. Martino slammed against the ropes, his mouth open, exposing the pale pink mouthpiece. Joey followed, his eyes on Martino's right hand, waiting. He never saw the left. Suddenly he was reeling back and a human dynamo was pouring blows on him. Joey bobbed and weaved, his arms covering his face. Now he was down and the bell rang again and again over the noisy crowd.

Joey returned to his corner with his father's help. Whitey doused him with cool water, ran the sponge over his face, squeezed more water onto his head.

MIKE RIVERS said, "You can't get careless like that, not with Martino. Watch his right but don't forget he's got two hands. You caught him once with a left hook and you can do it again, only this time put some muscle behind it. Get that left shoulder up a little higher and Martino can pickle his right hand. C'mon, Joey, take him. This is your big fight—"

Both boys touched gloves and the referee stepped aside. Martino stabbed with his left twice. Joey pushed it aside once, caught it the second time. Again that left then the right making a half-circle. Joey's left came around. Martino's mouthpiece sailed out of his mouth half across the ring. Angrily, Martino fought back. Joey tied him up and, before Martino could begin his body attack, pushed him away. Snarling something, Martino tried a one-two punch. Joey let the left hand ride, then his own came around in a short arc. Martino went down.

In a neutral corner Joey looked out at the crowd, wondered at their sudden change in affection. A few minutes ago they'd

pleaded with Martino to end the fight, now they were cheering Joey. The boxing fan is a crazy guy, his father had once said, he wants to see blood and he doesn't particularly care whose.

Martino was up. Joey was across the canvas in a few steps, backed Martino into a neutral corner, blasted him down with two straight hooks to the head, then trotted to a neutral corner.

At the count of ten, Mike Rivers came out to meet Joey, his eyes bright. "Good fight, Joey. You're on your way."

Joey said questioningly, "You and me, Dad?"

"You and me and Whitey."

Joey's lips quivered. He tried to talk but he couldn't. He wanted to tell his Dad how with the money he'd get for this fight he could get a chain to go with that watch he'd won in the amateurs.

TWO years and six months later New York's favorite columnist said: Hottest rumor on the Beach is that Joey Rivers, newly crowned Champ, is burning his gloves. After his marriage to the pretty Anne Wallace, the rumor says, Joey is going into the poultry business with his Dad and manager, Mike Rivers. Joey Rivers retiring? Wanna bet?

ALL HE WANTED was to dig a well—a water well—for the only girl in the world.

ALL THE REST of the population was interested only in oil—which traditionally doesn't mix with water.

"The Master of Dead Man's Dome"

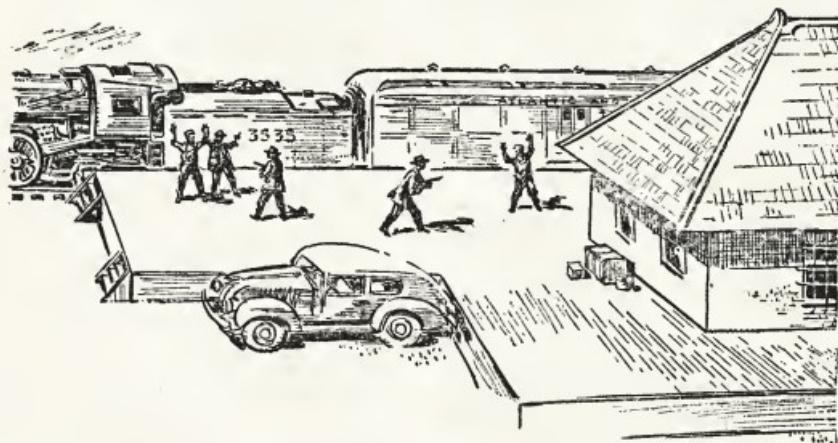
A novelette in our next issue by

DEE LINFORD



"

*Not Necessarily Big Time Crooks, but Certainly Big
Time Operators Led by a Big Timer"*



THE BLIND ALLEY

By WILLIAM L. ROHDE

THE big man strutted back and forth on top of the hill overlooking a small New England railroad station. He carried his shoulders too far back, like those of a Plebe trying to outdo his class, or a youngster showing off before the girls.

"See, Francis," he gestured imperiously at the thin, pale-faced young man who lounged beside the parked Buick, "plans work perfectly when you are careful, and daring."

The thin man took a few steps away from the car—he seemed to be clinging to it for security—and looked over the brow of the slope towards the station, where the big man pointed.

"There's Pedro and Nick with the can opener. Watch this—"

The scene at the base of the hill might have been a modern Currier and Ives railroad print. A train was stopped at the station, its stack and exhaust tracing patterns

in the clean morning air. The few figures of men which scampered about it seemed to be engaged in regular pursuits. There was an expressman unloading merchandise and packages from the express car, the engineer poking around the siderods and cylinders of the 4-8-4 Niagara Class locomotive with a long-nosed oil can, and three lonesome-looking passengers disappearing into the two green coaches.

The men called Pedro and Nick were walking towards the mail and express cars from the station parking lot, where four automobiles were parked in early-morning solitude. They carried something long and bulky, wrapped in burlap. When they stopped a few feet from the engine, other men were seen to approach the train quickly from behind the station and freighthouse. Suddenly the scene laid out beneath the two men on the hill assumed the appearance of The Great Train Robbery in a quickie movie. But there were no cameras in sight.



The big man put his binoculars into the leather case around his neck and glanced at his pocket watch.

"7:41, Francis," he said, "right on schedule. Things are moving smoothly. It's time to go down."

The thin man's Adam's apple bobbed as he acknowledged the order and held open the Buick's door for the big man, who took his seat with the air of a Napoleon stepping into his coach. The thin man slammed the door, ran around the car, and a second later toolled it down the winding road to the station.

When the big man stepped from the car in front of the building he held a Luger with a twelve-inch barrel in his right hand. He held it lightly, and an expression of sneering distaste about his lips seemed to say that he was above violence—but!

It began to look as if he might need the big 9 MM cannon. The train and engine crews were standing with their hands in the

air under the persuasion of men with Tommy guns—a couple of gunmen had disappeared into the coaches and, by the silence within, presumably had the handful of passengers under control—but around the baggage car behind the mail and express car, the holdup men were having difficulty.

The railway postal clerk had been pulled from his car, and the expressman was lined up with the engine crew, but several scattered shots sounded near the baggage car door and it was rammed shut. The man who had tried to enter it ran back to where Pedro and Nick were uncovering the object wrapped in burlap.

A second later a German anti-tank rifle appeared on its tripod, pointing threateningly at the closed door of the railway car.

While Pedro and Nick huddled over the gun like a trained combat team, the other man ran toward the big man with the Luger, who stood near the station bay-window. He

was light on his feet, and his face was eager, like a commando at the peak of his training. "Sir," he panted slightly, "all secure but the money car. Gun ready to open her up."

The man addressed peered briefly into the station, where the agent-operator lay bound on the floor of his office.

"We'll follow plan two, Fritz," he answered. "Cut off the engine and two head cars. You stay here with your group and hold up the alarm and all communications for exactly"—he glanced at his watch again—"twenty minutes."

The man called Fritz ran to the gun team and snapped orders. Pedro and Nick raced towards a parked car with their heavy weapon. Then Fritz held both his hands above his head, waved them back and forth in a scissors stroke. The bandits began to move like a well-oiled machine. One of the tommy gunners gave his weapon to his companion and clambered into the engine cab like a man who knew what he was doing. Another man pulled the pin behind the second car and there was a snap and hiss of air as the forward part of the train moved smoothly ahead.

The man re-entered the Buick and was joined by three more men. The four automobiles moved out like a tank column, three following the country road that paralleled the track, and one parking beside the men who covered the railroaders and the coaches. A moment later a large red truck, marked "Maple Rest Country Dairy" rumbled down the road along which the three cars had disappeared. Some of the men under guard wondered why the driver didn't stop when he saw them with their hands in the air.

THHEY would have understood if they could have seen the action on a section of the track reached only by a dirt road that led to a farmer's mowing. The portion of the train, the three automobiles, and the red truck were clustered together. The anti-tank rifle was in position beside the car again and the big man stood nearby.

"Hello in there," he shouted, "open up and come out at once, or you'll get blown out."

The man or men within the big steel car made no sound.

The big man stepped away from the car and nodded slightly. The mounted gun

erupted with a crashing *b-woosh* and a double explosion roared as the armor-crushing shell exploded its load flat against the railroad car door.

Like well-trained infantry creeping up on a pillbox firing port, two men approached the fractured door from each side. The first man inserted a long crowbar near the latch and pried. A shot sounded from within and the man jumped back, but not before the door had creaked aside several inches in its runners.

The man called Nick crept underneath the car until he could reach the black slash that marked the door opening. There was a grin beneath his small blond mustache as he pulled the pins from two grenades at once and stuck his hand up into the car. He hurled one bomb each way, towards both ends of the car. A shot sounded, like a hammer striking an empty tank, and a slug whanged off the door. Nick withdrew his hand unscathed and scuttled back beneath the brake rigging.

A DOUBLE explosion shook the air, like the sound of dynamite dropped in a well. The man in the attacking squad picked up the bar and completed the job of opening the door almost before the echoes died away in the green hills. The red truck backed up and the holdup men laid aside their arms and became stevedores, loading the "Dairy" truck with the energy and smoothness of a crew of busy ants.

Sixteen minutes later the big man looked at his watch. "Green rocket," he said primly. The pale-faced chauffeur jumped to comply, arching the green ball of light back along the railroad right-of-way where it could easily be seen by the men at the station.

Seven minutes later the red truck and the autos left the Niagara engine and the two cars standing alone amid the peaceful trees and the meadow which stretched away to the west. The substitute engineer had filled the locomotive's tank with water, to prevent an explosion, and he had thoughtfully set the handbrakes on the cars.

Only the smell of explosives, the ruptured car door, and the two bodies in the baggage car, said that death and violence had marked the train's unscheduled stop.

Mo Daniels wandered through the crowd of vacationers that thronged the Black River

station. He had shooed a ten-year-old off the tracks, settled a parking dispute, and received a railroad telegram telling him to check on a missing shipment of plumbing supplies, since arriving at the station at six a.m. He reached the trainmen's register window and looked in at the operator.

"Hiyuh, Parks," he called, "anything more for me? Think I'll go down on 82."

This young operator shoved his eyeshade back and looked up. "Hi, Mo, X office is calling on 21 right now. Let me see if any for you."

He delicately fingered his bug with one finger, keying a slow—"I X JC GA." The sounder went dead for a moment, and then began to feed a parade of cricket chirps into the air. Parks sat down and kept pace with his typewriter.

A girl came up to the window, looked over Daniels' two-hundred pounds, jet black hair and tanned, agreeable face, and decided that he'd do.

"Can you tell me when the train goes to Springfield?" she asked.

Daniels twisted aside and noted the interesting blond hair and brown eyes. He let his eyes travel downward and O.K.'d the rest of the picture.

"Fifteen minutes," he grinned easily. "The smoking car will be on the rear. I find it pretty comfortable."

Her eyes and lips said, "Thank you."

Daniels watched her sway away, and bet himself even money he'd meet her again in the smoker—which wouldn't be bad.

Park's shocked face, staring at him through the iron wicket, stopped his dreaming.

"Wow, Mo! Whaddyuh think of this? Look! Hold-up at Leverett!"

Daniels grabbed the message blank and read swiftly. "Robbery and killing at Leverett. Meet me there." It was signed T. Liffy, Atlantic and Northern Police Department.

"So long," Mo said over his shoulder as he started moving. He ran to his car and left the station lot in a shower of cinders.

It is forty miles from Black River to Leverett. Daniels was sorry afterward that he didn't time himself on the run. He had his V-8's gas pedal on the floor most of the way, and near Tannertown he passed a State Police car that was doing seventy. The trooper was five seconds behind him into Leverett,

though, and all set to write out a hatful of tickets, until he saw Daniels running toward the railroad station.

A crowd of people thronged the station, all trying to tell their stories at once to another harried trooper and two local policemen from Leverett Center.

Daniels introduced himself to the State officer, a young stalwart with a worried look.

"Gee," he said, "this is some deal. There are two men dead in the car down the track. My partner has gone down there in the car. I've got thirty descriptions of these guys from thirty different people, and they say there were fifty of 'em. But some say there were maybe twenty or thirty. And they used anywhere from three to twelve cars and trucks."

Daniels nodded. "Thanks, I'll go down and have a look at those bodies. Might be something there if that's where the action was."

"Better not touch 'em. All the big boys are coming down. The Federals will be up from Boston. This is a big blow-off."

"Yeah," Daniels said, and went out.

AT TEN o'clock the next morning Daniels and Terrence Liffy sat in the diner at Leverett Center and compared notes. They were both red-eyed and tired, after a night of exhausting, fruitless work, and Daniels felt as though he had butted into a stone wall.

"It's a mess," Chief Liffy spoke into his coffee cup as he rubbed his temples like a man squeezing a concertina. "This thing is the biggest job I've tangled with in years."

Daniels glanced at the headlines in the Boston papers and the one local paper which screamed the stories of the hold-up—all the accounts were different. The facts did not even peep through the black ink. Lacking close coverage, the papers seemed to have turned rewrite men loose with shovels.

The chief noticed Daniels reading the papers and snorted. "Don't bother with that junk. You've got a better picture from the questioning."

Mohawk nodded, but noted to himself that it wasn't much of a picture. According to the stories of the trainmen and passengers, you could figure that between ten and forty men, in maybe four or ten cars and a truck marked "Maple Rest Country Dairy," had

held up the A. & N.'s No. 69—selecting with precision the train and the car that carried the largest shipment of currency and gold moved in years!

The dead men were Bienke and Phillips. Mo had worked with Phillips, an A. & N. railroad detective like himself, and he had the black score hard in his mind. But first—find the trail!

A yard-office clerk came in and gave Chief Liffy a handful of message blanks. He scanned rapidly through them.

"Here's a note," he said, "from Farr, the Federal man. They've got word that four cars and a red truck marked like the one we want were found abandoned in the woods near Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Says these cars were stolen in or near Portland, Maine, and the red truck is one that was hijacked on its Waterville-Boston run a month ago."

The chief massaged the back of his red, pudgy neck and turned over the message blanks with his other hand. Daniels signalled for more coffee.

"Here's another one," the chief continued. "That shipment figured about three million bucks. Says here almost half of it was in British pounds—some gold—rest U. S. money."

"Any date on those car thefts?" Mo asked casually.

"Nope. We'll get that when we go over to the local police station if you want it. The Staties have a seven-state alarm out, and we're using the radio room over there for an HQ."

"I don't think the net will get much," Mo said slowly.

Liffy pushed the papers into a pile and leaned back wearily. "Why not? I agree with you, but how do you figure it?"

"These guys are smart, as well as tough and vicious. Look at the timing on the job. The way they even moved the head-end of 69 out into the woods, so that the blast that opened the car wouldn't be heard in some nearby farmhouse. I'm tryin' to figure the way their leader would figure. I think that the minute the red truck left here, some kind of panels would be tied or clipped to its sides. Probably said "Interstate Express" or something like that on 'em, and were painted yellow."

Liffy nodded. "I'll buy that. All New England was covered with radio-cars all

night, but we didn't get a smell of 'em. Yet they got to Pittsfield."

"O.K. So they took the yellow panels with 'em an' burned 'em. By now there might be a truck headin' south through Philadelphia, or west through Albany marked 'Snowflake Diaper Service'—probably painted spotless white. A truck that was stolen, say, a month ago, in Chicago."

Liffy grimaced. "You make this sound like a tough case. If those guys were that smart, they've driven up a blind alley and pulled it in behind them."

"That's right. There's a few little angles to start on. The fact that they knew about the big shipment—the fact that they took the English money, which can hardly be disposed of in such a big amount in this country—the fact that a gang like that is disciplined, and the boss would want to keep 'em together usually, like a sergeant watching over his platoon."

"I agree with you, Mo, but there's not a hell of a lot to work on there. You had a lot of experience in this line with the Army Intelligence, I know, but—" Liffy thought for a moment, "suppose I carry the boss' reasoning a bit further. I'm the leader, see, and I buy a little summer cottage down on the shore of the Delaware River. A little place that's a mile from any other. So I unload the loot at this place, send the truck into Camden or some place to be ditched, and settle down with the gang for a three-month rest until the heat begins to simmer down."

Mo nodded as he brought out a straight Flame Grain briar pipe and began to fill it from a leather pouch. "If that happened, we're licked until we start to get the breaks, like one of the gang gets drunk a year from now and starts to spill and is picked up. But I think this guy, call him Leader, is even smarter. The old hole-up is an American stunt. Our man may be an American, but he's world minded. I think the gang will be outward bound on a plane or ship, with the loot, before a month has passed."

LIFFY rubbed his head again and emitted something like a moan. "You make it sound so nice. Why the devil couldn't they have stuck up the New Haven or the Pennsy and leave me alone?"

He drank his fresh coffee. "Look here,

Mo. I wasn't gonna tell you this. Not only is Phillips dead, our man and our friend, and I'm on the spot, but the A. & N. is going to be on the pan, too. That shipment should have been handled in No. 51, that don't make all these back-country stops. It's too late to yell at the Chief Dispatcher who made the move, but the insurance company will start to yell in a day or two when they figure it out."

Mo put his lighter on top of the briar and pulled. So, he thought, you think you've had bad luck when you stumble—and then the house falls on you. For once he was glad he didn't have Liffy's job.

"Mo," the chief said slowly, "I'm expecting Champoux up here this morning to take over for you."

Daniels looked up in surprise, and the chief shook his head up and down.

"You're the only guy on the force who even has an idea how to tackle something as big as this. I'm going to turn you loose on it. Forget everything else."

Daniels took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at the beautiful patterns on the bowl. He thought of the chief's problem. A nice old guy who knew every pickpocket in Boston, and could catch a little gang stealing freight out of boxcars by dogged footwork and an old cop's sixth sense, dropped into the middle of an all-directions, Sherlock Holmes problem.

"I'll do my best," Mo said, "but try and put the Feds and the States on the trail if you can. I mean, help 'em with all that I've told you."

"I will," Terence Liffy said, "and thanks. But, Mo boy—I want you to go after 'em. I think you can. Go down that blind alley and bring 'em out."

There was nothing to say. Mo let the chief pay the check and led the way out into the warm sunshine.

THE Yankee Hotel in Portland was the only one in which Mo Daniels was not on close terms with the house detective, so he checked in there and slept for four hours. He had driven in from Leverett with only two stops for coffee-and. When the telephone call from the desk roused him at 8 p.m. he took a shower and had a double order of bacon and eggs and two pots of coffee sent up. When he had finished the

first plate of eggs he picked up the phone.

"Bell captain?" he said when the connection went through, "will you step up here and bring the house officer with you?"

Three minutes later there was a sharp rap on the door, and two men practically burst into the room in answer to Daniels' "Come in."

Both men were young. The one in green and gold hotel livery looked excitedly around, and the tall man in a gray single-breasted suit had his hand partly raised toward his lapel.

"Don't draw that Magnum," Daniels grinned, "I just wanted to talk to you."

The tall man stared. "How d'you know I carry a Magnum?" he demanded.

"Because I used to, when I got my first job as a hotel officer. They had just come out. It took me a couple of years to get sick of carrying all that weight around. Then once I shot at a thief in a hall and the slug went through three rooms—just missed a guest."

"My name's Fredericks," the tall man said, after a moment's pause. "Who're you?"

"Glad to meet you, Fredericks," Daniels gestured at the bureau. "Take a look at my tin and card over there. And help yourselves to some of that Old Forester, boys."

Fredericks started to refuse, but the bell captain was pouring three generous slugs almost before Daniels closed his mouth. Fredericks appeared young and rather diffident as he accepted his glass after glancing at Daniels' badge and ID card.

"Howdy, Daniels," he said finally, "what can we do for you?"

Mo glanced at the notes on the stolen cars. They had all been lifted between May 5th and 28th. The truck had been hijacked, empty on its northbound run, on May 24th.

"I'm working on that railroad stick-up you're reading about in the papers. I'm interested in any groups of three or more men who registered here from about April 15th to May 5th, and checked out about May 30th. Can do?"

Fredericks put down the bourbon and dumped water into his glass for a chaser. "Can do. I guess the night clerk can check that info all right. You got any tips, Pat?"

The bell captain's brows drew together. "I dunno. There are so many through here.

Maybe I can help after we see how the registrations look."

Daniels put another drink into them and let them go. He finished his bacon and eggs, poured himself a coffee royal, and began to write his report.

The radio had just begun to chant the evening news when Fredericks rapped on the door and walked in. He had a stack of papers in his hands.

"There's a lot of 'em," he motioned with the white sheets, "I borrowed all the transcripts."

It took an hour to check the groups of guests. Telephone calls to the night clerk eliminated those who had stayed at the Yankee before, and there were plenty of them. Finally eleven groups of names remained, with addresses all the way from Argentia, Newfoundland, to La Jolla, California.

"Fredericks," Daniels said, "I want you to stay on this telephone and call everyone of these people. That is, at least one man from each party until you have covered every bunch. If any are phonies, that's what we want."

"If any don't answer, call the local police there and ask about them. All we want to know is—if these names are real people, and if they were staying at the Yankee on the dates they were supposed to."

The house detective stared. "That'll be a lot of money," he said. "All over the country like that."

Daniels grinned. "That's right, and there's a twenty for you after you finish. You're not cramped for time, are you?"

Fredericks shrugged and reached for the phone. "You know all about that. Here we go."

Daniels waved at the Old Forester. "Help yourself, I'll see you about eleven."

He put on his brown porkpie and sauntered out.

AT THE Senator Hotel, the New Engander, and the Foreham, his task was easier. He met house officers who were old friends, and many of them could eliminate suspected names at a glance. Fourteen telephone calls sufficed to eliminate all groups of men registered, except two sets of Army officers. Daniels cleared them quickly by knowing who to call in Washington—the

Army men might have been in Portland, and if they were, they were there legitimately.

Bideault, the ex-Boston cop who held down the carpets at the New Engander, knew as much about the case as Daniels. He questioned him over highballs in the Whaler Room.

"This is a tough one, Mo, what gave you the idea to start on the hotels? These guys might live on a houseboat on Lake Erie, or hole-up while they were here with friends."

Daniels shrugged, feeling the truth of Bideault's remarks more than he liked to admit.

"It's just a chance, Pete. If this angle misses, I've got plenty of others. The guys we're looking for are big-timers, led by a big-timer. Maybe not big-time crooks, I mean, but big-time operators. They'd figure that the best place to operate was out of an expensive suite, in a good hotel where plenty of people come and go."

Bideault sighed. "Possible, but I would not like this trail. It is like looking for shadows at night."

"You can find shadows at night by just building a fire."

"Yes, but sometimes the woods are wet."

Daniels felt tired of swapping discouragements. He bought Bideault another drink, and then went back to the Yankee.

Daniels lay on the bed in Daniels' room, his shoes off, and his snores banging comfortably off the walls. His coat had fallen open and the checked walnut stocks of an S. & W. .357 Magnum peeped from a spring shoulder rig.

"Hey," Daniels called, "wake up. Your artillery is showing."

Daniels grunted, twisted to his feet, and rather sheepishly pulled his coat lapels together.

"I called 'em all," he said. "Everyone was genuine. That bunch from Casper, Wyoming, ain't home yet. But the lawman out there said there's four dentists by those names traveling in the East."

Daniels washed his disappointment down with a shot of Old Forester. "They're probably O.K. then," he said.

He pulled a twenty out of his wallet and handed it to the house dick. Fredericks took it with a slight air of embarrassment.

Daniels grinned at him. "You haven't learned to get your palm out fast enough yet,

Bub. Take what you can get on your job, and look for more."

The younger man smiled sheepishly. "I only been here a month," he admitted. "Got the job because I got a Congressional. But it's kinda Greek to me. I was a plumber's helper before the war, and then I was just a guy with a Garand and a hatful of grenades until they made me a sergeant out there."

Daniels handed out a cigar and lit one for himself. "Don't worry about it, Bub. That's a better set of recommendations than I had when I started. Here's a tip, though. Go to a good tailor when you get the dough, and have a couple of double-breasted suits made. Let him fit 'em around that cannon if you want to carry it."

Fredericks thought it over for a minute. "Thanks," he said finally, "I guess you ain't kidding me. What's that again about my gun?"

"Well," Daniels said, "this is just my experience. You can figure it out for yourself. If you'll buy a .38 Terrier made by the same people, you'll have about a pound and a half less iron to lug around every day. And if you'll make yourself good with it, it's about all you'll ever need."

The new house officer went away with his brows knitted in thought. Daniels turned in, to dream about long passageways down which he raced after shadows that laughed silently while they disappeared round corridors, far out of his reach.

THIE Flaubert Express and Long Distance Haulage Company had a tiny office on a street leading away from Portland's waterfront.

Daniels found Gracio Flaubert hunched over books and waybills at a battered desk which faced the street. The roadway could not be seen, however, because the window was covered with dirt as if it had undergone a plastering job with mud.

The owner of the company was intelligent, business-like, and cooperative.

"I built this company up from nothin'," he told Daniels a few minutes after he entered. "I got fourteen trucks now, including the one that was stole. They're sending it back to me. The insurance company will make some kind of adjustment, I guess."

"Let's hope so," Daniels told him, "I'd like to hear about the hijacking. All the de-

tails, if you can remember 'em. Maybe we can get those birds yet."

"Not much of a story. One of my boys named Smith was bringin' her up from Boston empty. He went down with a load, of potatoes. Coming back, just after he left the Speedball Diner in Kennebunk, a sedan forced him to a stop. They tied him up in the back of the sedan and drove him around for an hour, then let him out near York Village. Dumped him beside the road, that is. A man from York Harbor found him."

DANIELS thought this over. "So they stole an empty truck, and then held the driver. Looks like they wanted to get the truck under cover before the alarm went out."

"Yea, we figured that. The State Police and the insurance company's men have been on the case. They finally said the truck might have been repainted and run out West."

"Could your driver make a guess as to which way the truck went after he was grabbed?"

"Yea, he thinks it was turned and went south."

"Did he describe the men?"

"It was dark, but he saw two of 'em. Husky, well-dressed, and he said they were not colored, nor even dark-skinned. The Staties asked him that ten times."

Daniels pondered this news. "Doesn't it look to you as if the trail might lead to Boston? That would be the most likely place going south."

"Could be. I'm a truckman, not a detective."

Daniels thanked him and pointed the V-8 at Boston.

AT SEVEN o'clock that night Daniels sat over a steak in his room on the tenth floor of the Hotel Statler. He had cleared the Statler's guest lists, and the calls covering registrations at the Parker House and Manger were on the wires. He was forking through the apple-pie underneath two scoops of chocolate ice cream, when Wingy Muldaven came in.

Muldaven was an ex-baseball pro who found the duties of an A. & N. patrolman much to his liking. He was a stocky, keen-eyed man of forty with a good-humored, tolerant lift to the corners of his mouth.

"Hello, Wingy," Daniels greeted him

around a mouthful of pie, "have some coffee. Drink?"

"Both."

He proceeded to serve himself as he talked. "I checked the Ritz-Carleton and the Cabot like you told me, Mo. The calls are in to check the out-of-town groups. I found one bunch might be interesting."

Daniels nearly choked on his coffee. "Talk!" he gasped, "Gimme a lead if you've got one."

Wingy sat down in an easy chair—coffee cup in one hand and glass of bourbon in the other. "This is the life," he said, "better'n pro ball, even."

"Never mind the story of your life. Give."

"Here it is," Wingy grinned. "There was six guys checked out of the Ritz and the Cabot on June 2nd. They'd been there since May 1st. That's why it looked funny to me. Two groups just alike in two hotels."

Daniels nodded. "Two good hotels, too. What names?"

Wingy handed him a list. It read like a New England telephone directory of a typical summer colony. Daniels repeated, "John Roberts, William Smith, Roger Brown, Thomas Jones—"

He stopped reading aloud and the two men looked at each other.

"Do you see anything funny?" Daniels asked.

"Yea. Those names are all common ones."

Daniels nodded, his eyes studying the list. "These are names that someone not too familiar with America might pick, just as some of our boys during the war made the mistake of calling themselves by too-common French or Italian names. For instance, if you tell a cop today your name is John Smith you might get a pop in the eye."

"Well," Wingy said, "I got more news for you. One guy registered for all those birds, and he paid the bills every week and when they checked out. On the registration card where it says 'company', he wrote Plymouth Mining and Engineering Company, Baltimore. There ain't no such animal."

The breath rippled over Daniels' lips in a sigh. "It's a lead, that's all. Let's not get too happy about it, but I'm gonna check up. Any forwarding address?"

Wingy looked mournful. "I even tried the porters and the cabbies. No address.

Nobody remembers where they went. Nothin' in."

Daniels reached for his hat. "I'll see what I can dig up. You gonna be around?"

"See you tomorrow afternoon. I gotta go to Ayer on a kid case. Stones again."

"O. K.," Daniels waved his hand, "meet me here tomorrow evening."

BACK BAYERS were sauntering through the warm night on their rounds between the Copley-Plaza and the Ritz Roof when Daniels hurried across Boylston Street. He would have liked to join the peaceful parade—preferably with a blonde who gave him a smooth double-take at the Ritz door—but he compromised by winking at her following the trail.

The trail was ice cold at the Ritz. Bell captains—waiters—the house officer—none seemed to have paid the slightest attention to the men who had been their guests for a month. At the desk he did learn that the man who called himself Roger Brown had paid the bills. The cashier seemed to think he was a nice looking boy, something like Fredric March.

The copies of the bills were brought out eventually by a reluctant assistant manager. They told nothing. No laundry, no telephone calls, no room service.

Daniels drove to the Cabot, leaving the V-8 in charge of the doorman while he went through his routine again. The hotel employees were of no assistance. He found the maid who had cleaned the rooms.

"I was on days then," she said, "I remember those people. Rooms 727, 728, and 729. They were nice clean guests. Easy to service."

Daniels almost pleaded with her for something more. Descriptions? Luggage? How did they talk?

She just couldn't remember.

The copies of the bills were produced, after an assistant manager who used perfume had telephoned the A. & N. offices and consulted at length with the house officer.

"Really," he told Daniels, "I don't see why you should bother me this way. I really have all I can attend to. We're so very, very busy."

"Sorry," Daniels said, "just bear up under it—dear."

The man ran a hand carefully over both sides of his head, patting his black waves in place, and then handed Daniels the bills.

The man named Roger Brown had stayed in 729. There were the usual entries for lodging, but on the next to the last bill Daniels found several room-service charges against 729, and, 44 cents for four telephone calls!

Mo stood for a moment, his weight against the desk. He wondered what night the man called Brown had been too lazy to come downstairs and use the pay stations, which must have been the usual practice. Could it be a weak link in the chain?

"These 'phone calls," he told the manager, "have you got a record of the numbers?"

"I think so," the man replied, "because we often have guests who insist they are charged for calls that they did not make. Now, whether we keep those slips this long or not—"

He turned and rapped his pencil against a glass partition, like a polite woodpecker asking for attention. A blonde whose come-and-get-it air was hardly dampened by the earphones she wore popped up into sight.

"Miss Weaver, can you get me the slips on these calls?"

She looked at the date. "Why, sure, Harry. Just a sec."

FIVE minutes later Daniels walked into the 4th Precinct Station. He found Lieutenant Curley reading a copy of the *Traveler* and eating peanuts from a large bag. Daniels helped himself. Curley nodded and sighed, a rugged Irishman who had too little pull and too few relatives in city hall to escape the long night jobs.

"Hello, Mo. Thought you were up in the country for awhile."

"I was," Mo told him, "but the case brought me through town."

Curley took off his horn-rimmed glasses. "What'll it be?"

Daniels handed him the slip of paper with the telephone number on it that he had received from the perfumed "Harry." The Boston cop read it, pressed a buzzer under his desk and talked into his telephone for a moment, and then waited. Daniels watched the teletype machine beyond the door spit out some yellow ribbon. He had

counted about three feet of the paper when Curley picked up his 'phone again, listened, wrote something on the paper, and hung up.

"This'll do it," he said, and pushed the paper at Daniels.

Under the telephone number was now written "45-33 Sussor Street, Revere."

Daniels pulled three cigars from his breast pocket and put them on the desk. Curley put one between his heavy lips and snapped off the end with big white teeth.

"Pay-offs are lousy these days," he said.

Daniels laughed. "You should worry. I hear you've got the city paint supply in your cellar."

Curley puffed smoke. "Get on your job, boy. Then come back and tell me about it. I get bored in this town after thirty years."

Daniels grinned as he went out. He had done Curley a few favors—they were a good investment.

Number 45-33 Sussor Street was a few blocks in from the north end of Revere Beach. A dying area of low-rental tene- ments and newer, cheap single houses fitted in like false teeth where the three-story buildings were missing.

A light rain was falling when Daniels parked the V-8 a few blocks from the number and walked back. He faced into a chill wind from the sea, and nearly missed the small yellow house, a long and narrow cottage with stucco walls and a wide drive-way leading back beside it. There was a light in one window, but it was on the opposite side and disappeared when Daniels ducked his head and hurried down the drive.

He banged his head in the darkness against a wooden door that shook on its hinges. His pen-flash showed him a large building that might have once been a barn or stable. There was a small door set in the big wooden one, and it opened to his touch.

The musty odor of time and paint and decay hit his nostrils and he flashed his light around. The place was big—and very empty. It was the kind of joint you'd use to hold a gay party, if the guests were vampires. Daniels started to go out and then a thought chased around in his mind.

Paint? Dust and space and old wood, yes, but paint? He walked to the back of the place and began to haul at a brown

tarp that bulged along the wall. Soon he had exposed several dozen cans of paint, both full and empty, and a quantity of brushes, thrown down uncleansed, as though the painter knew his job was done.

Daniels looked at his find for long enough to rub his hard jaw four times. A lot of the paint was red.

THE door of the building opened again and a flash more blinding than his own bored at him. A hoarse voice that somehow sounded wrong rasped, "Who're you? Talk. There's a gun on you."

Daniels faced the light and looked well above it. "Awright," he mumbled, "ya got me. Please don't turn me in. I didn't take nuttin'."

There was silence. Daniels raised his hands slightly and spread them. Then the light moved aside.

"Get out of here," the hoarse voice said, "and don't let me see any more of you."

"Gee, thanks—thanks." Daniels hurried for the door. He finally saw the barrel of the 3-cell light and the blue of a small pistol in the darkness beside it. When he was almost in front of them he reached out and yanked both objects toward him.

The little revolver barked. A lightweight body lurched into him and he caught the sweet scent of Tabu or one of the imitations. There was a gasp. Daniels wrenched the gun free and let it fly away—it would be dangerous even as a club. Then he found out what it's like to walk into an electric fan.

Nails scraped his right cheek and neck and dug for his eyes. A stabbing heel found his toe and seemed to cut it off and then cut into his shin when he gasped.

Daniels gathered the electric fan, which was now screaming some solid sailor's curses in a very unglamorous tone, into his arms and fell backwards. When he hit he lifted up his legs and locked a scissors around the frame on top of him. He captured one free arm—and the fan stopped buzzing.

It was rather an unusual sensation, lying in the semi-darkness with an unknown babe locked in his arms. You're liable to think of a lot of funny things at a time like that. Daniels thought about—how do you let go of a tiger's tail?

"Hey," he said finally, "do you stop try-

ing to chaw me up or do I choke you quietly, right here?"

A muffled voice, but completely feminine, came up from somewhere beneath his chin. He had the girl's face locked against him, and the perfume of some fluffy hair that drifted up into his face went well with the Tabu.

"What do you want?"

"I want to go into the house and talk to you. Then I'll go."

Another pause. "All right."

Daniels said. "If you try to kick me when I let you go, I'll twist your pretty throat. Even if it ain't pretty, I'll twist it."

The voice was calmer now. "I said all right."

Daniels pushed her away from him and quickly dove for the flashlight which had rolled against the wall and was wasting its rays against the wood. When he had it he raced into the corner and picked up the little gun. It was a small .32 that looked like one of the cheap Spanish imitations.

He had been watching the girl out of the corner of his eye. She had not moved, and now he turned the light full on her.

Fancy Dorothy Lamour after being chased two miles by Harpo Marx. Dress condensed enough to be a sarong. That was it. Eyes that flashed back at him and red lips, bowed in a contemptuous smile. Daniels let his breath whistle slightly across his lips.

"Lead the way," he said at last, "inside."

They went in a side door of the cottage, through a small hallway to a room with several lamps throwing soft lights on blue coverings and drapes. The room was overfurnished, but it was rich and comfortable, with a fireplace at one end flanked by hand-built bookcases.

"Your place?" Daniels asked when the girl paused beside a low coffee table.

"Yes," she answered, "like it?"

"I don't know yet. What do you do for a living?"

She caught the implication and flushed. "Not what you think, thief."

She started to sit in one of the overstuffed chairs that flanked the fireplace with the coffee table between them.

"Uh-uh uh!" Daniels reached out and pulled her upright. "You stand right there like a nice little girl."

He ran his hands around the sides of the cushion in the chairseat, and came up with a CZ Czechoslovakian .25-caliber automatic. He looked at the girl reprovingly and shook his head.

The lips parted and a tongue came out between them, like a strawberry peeping for a moment through the jam.

"Sit down and stay put," Daniels said, "and maybe you and I'll get along."

In the next four minutes he collected a High Standard .380 automatic from behind the books on the fireplace mantel, two beautiful Mauser double action .32's out of a liquor cabinet, and a .25-caliber Italian Beretta from beneath a couch.

Daniels dumped the collection into a hand embroidered tablecloth and pulled the ends together. "Say," he said when he had finished and dropped into the chair opposite the girl, "I'd hate like hell to search the rest of the house. Do you entertain often?"

The girl scowled at him. She looked good scowling. "Why don't you go home?"

"I will, if you'll just tell me one or two little things."

"Like what?"

"Like about the people you rented your barn to. And where they've gone."

The red lips pointed in thought. The plucked, high-arching brows came together. Daniels thought—she's wondering how much trash she can dish out. Go to it sister.

"All right," the girl said, "there were about a dozen men. They used my place and paid me well. That's all I know."

"Did they paint a truck in there, and maybe doctor up some stolen cars, too?"

"Could be. I wouldn't know."

The hell you wouldn't—the comment drifted across Daniel's mind like an electric news sign—you're as smooth and tough as hi-nickel.

"Where'd they go?" he snapped.

"I dunno," she rapped right back.

DANIELS got up and walked over to the thick blue drapes. He untied the long cords that held them in position and came back to the girl. Her eyes were wide, like those of a rabbit facing an advancing hunter with nowhere to run. "What are you goin' to do?"

"Nothing much," Daniels soothed, "just tie you up a bit until I make my getaway."

The girl stood up and walked into Daniels. Her head turned up to him and he saw that the lights were still in the eyes, although there was no flashlight on them now. He also saw that they were very brown, with the soft depths of old ale in dark bottles. The Tabu reached for him again and he was conscious of the clean scent of her breath, sharpened slightly with tobacco.

"Take it easy," she said, "why not stick around awhile? I'll mix us a drink, and we can part friends."

The red lips were inches from his—her weight sagged on him until he had to take her.

"Maybe I won't have to untie myself," she breathed, "maybe you'd like to come again sometime—if we're friends."

Daniels wished he had more time.

"Sorry, Baby," he said, "I've gotta go places."

He sidestepped the knee that came up at him and tied her hands and feet with the blue cords. Then he tossed her onto the studio couch.

"Where do you think you're going," she snapped, "you'll never find 'em."

"Sure, I will," Daniels said sweetly, "you've told me part of it. And now you're going to tell me the rest."

Her color paled a bit at that, then flooded back. "Do your damndest, you two-bit thick-head. You won't get a thing out of me."

Daniels went over to the liquor cabinet and poured himself a double-plus of Old Taylor. He took his coat off, pushed his hat on the back of his head, and lit a cigarette. Then he stood beside the studio couch, glass in one hand, cigarette in the other.

"Ha," the girl sneered, "get started tough guy. Let's see how much you know. Burn me. Beat me. Kill me. I won't talk."

"Gee," Daniels said, "you'd even like it if I did it, wouldn't you? Have you ever seen a good psychiatrist?"

She cursed at him.

"You've already told me all I have to know," Daniels said. "The lads I want were here. You probably were pretty chummy with at least one of 'em, and you've

got a contact to him. If not, you're suspicious and selfish enough to have slipped your nose into their plans whether they wanted it there or not."

The rabbit eyes widened and then came down abruptly. Daniels laughed and went into the bedroom with the girl's wild curses following him.

It was a long job. Theresa Talmadge was a woman of many affairs and much property. Daniels found deeds, bonds, and notes.

Once he stopped searching and went out and put a napkin from the liquor cabinet between Theresa's pretty lips. From then on he worked faster, in silence.

Success came after three in the morning. Daniels had gone through two address books completely, eliminating the obvious, the women, and names evidently written long ago. He found a slip of paper stuck in the "G" listing. On it was written "Groton near New London. *SS Mable Skye*, Sammy and Nick."

He stuck a cigarette in his mouth, flamed it, and went back into the living room. "Sammy and Nick," he said softly, "Groton near New London."

He pulled the gag from her mouth.

"You scum," she screamed, "oh, you stinking scum. They'll kill you. I hope they kill you—"

She sobbed and cursed incoherently as Daniels smiled to himself—a mixed emotion of satisfaction and weariness—and went to the telephone.

After he made his call he brewed a pot of coffee in the spotless, all-white kitchen and fed a cup to Theresa when she asked for it. She didn't thank him.

Shortly after five there came a knock on the side door that brought Daniels' Police Positive out of its shoulder next in a split second. He opened the door with the gun held well back against his hip, and put it away when a big man greeted him and came in.

The newcomer moved with the smooth grace of a sailor who hasn't let the waterfront beat the sea's health out of him. He had black hair and the look of a man who likes life, no matter what the taste.

"Hello, Al," Daniels said when they reached the living room, "this is Theresa. I'd like you to keep her company for the

day, and pick up anyone who comes to call. If you get in a spot 'phone Curley."

"Can do," the man called Al answered, "how's things with you, Mo?"

"Fine. How's Sandy?"

"Great. She's gone to New York for a few days. We're putting the *Battledore* in the water next month."

Daniels nodded pleasantly and gathered up the table covering that held the gun collection.

"So long, Theresa," he turned to the girl. "I'm taking your arsenal along to remember you by. Keep your mouth shut and you might be all right if your boy friends don't talk."

She spat at him—a very unladylike gesture.

Daniels shook hands with Al Hammers. "Thanks, pal. If nothing happens, untie her at nine o'clock tonight and beat it."

The black-haired man nodded. "I'll untie her a few times in between for exercise. Don't worry about it."

"I won't," Daniels said over his shoulder, and went out.

THIE cool drabness of dawn found Daniels pushing the V-8 down Route 1. He stopped near Norwood for two cups of coffee that tasted like hot bran to his tired tongue, and then clocked off seventy miles at a smooth fifty.

The weariness and cobweb quality of the trail he was following sent his spirits down until he felt like a robot set in motion by the push of a button, doomed to wander on and on. Somewhere ahead he must find a man. A big man or a little man, but preferably big. A man big enough to hurt, because he had killed two honest men in cold blood. Killed men who had wives and families in order to take the pieces of paper and metal that they guarded.

Outside of Old Mystic he pulled off the road and slept for two hours. As always, he awoke refreshed, with the depression banished by the hot rays of the sun that streamed through the car windows on his neck. He drove on to New London.

The man in the tattered pilot's cap at the entrance to the Fisher's Island ferry landing scratched his head.

"*SS Mabel Skye*," he repeated with a good down-east twang, "no such ship in

these parts. I know every steamer that touches 'round New Lunnon. No *SS Mabel Skye*."

Daniels just looked at him. The old-timer put a match to the top of a corncob, smoke colored a deep brown.

"Nope," he answered the dismay in Daniels' gaze, "no *Mabel Skye*."

Mo walked into the New Haven station with sagging shoulders. He found a telephone and began calling the yacht clubs. At the first there was no answer. The second had never heard of the *SS Mabel Skye*. The girl that answered the telephone at the third club was clear and concise.

"Yes," she said, "the *Mabel Skye* is a four-masted schooner anchored in Towne's Inlet. She has her name boards in and they're always painting her, but I remember her from Boothbay Harbor."

Daniels thanked her and thanked her. She kept telling him it was all right.

Twenty dollars hired a scarred but apparently sturdy launch with a twin-cylinder inboard engine. The boatman accepted another twenty not to go along as pilot, although he argued that he never let that boat out without going along. Daniels spent five minutes learning the fuel valves and where to find the hidden knife switches that opened the battery wires. He received directions to Towne's Inlet and shoved off.

EVEN with the little power plant wide open it seemed like hours before Daniels turned east past the nun buoys off Avery Point and looked ahead toward Fisher's Island. The sun was hot and the sky cloudless, but a better than spanking breeze stirred the waters of the Sound and promised to windburn Daniels' cheeks. The water was rough, in its miniature, inshore way, and the little launch rolled and danced its way over the wavelets like a boy skipping home from school.

The afternoon was well advanced when Daniels sighted four topmasts looming over a spit of land, four fingers of wood against a blue mirror. He felt his heart keeping time with the sturdily thudding engine.

Before he rounded the point he put his sport jacket back on, covering up the Police Positive .38 in the shoulder rig. Then he took one of the loaded, streamlined Mauser "H Sc" automatics from the jacket pocket

and tucked it under a bit of tarpaulin. The other one, that balanced the coat in his other pocket, he hid under the short wood overhang of the forepeak.

He palmed the tiller and took a look at the *Mabel Skye*.

She was one of the wooden four-masted schooners built for freight service during the First World War. Graceful, fast, but without auxiliary power and inclined to be top-heavy under full canvas, the class had almost disappeared from the seas.

Daniels saw numberless changes in design and fittings that indicated the *Mabel Skye* had been around. Probably in island service, perhaps as a private plaything. He steered for the ladder hanging down her side.

THE man named Francis stood in the galley door of the ship and watched the launch with the single figure in it approach, leaving behind a small wake that was quickly lost in the choppy water. Francis felt terrible. He seemed to get sick even when they were anchored—heaven knows, he often cursed, what I'll do when we go to sea.

It was all right for Nick and Sam and some of them, they were old sailors. Spent years on the water. He hated it.

The launch came nearer. Headed for the ladder. Francis walked aft along the gently rolling deck and called to a man reclining in a hammock.

"Mr. Jung. There's a launch coming alongside."

The man called Jung was the big man of the 12-inch barrel Luger. The man whose mouth could look soft and cynical as he directed murderers in action. He arose and walked to the rail, rolling easily on trained sea-legs.

"So it is, Francis, so it is. Probably some native coming out for a look. Help him aboard."

Daniels tied his boat to the bottom of the chain ladder and climbed up. He accepted Francis' hand and jumped to the deck. Jung had returned to the hammock, but now five more men—looking somewhat like the crew of a Q-ship—lounged on the top of the battened hatch or against the boom above.

"Hello," Daniels said, "I'd like to look

her over. Long time since I saw one of these babies."

Jung rose and tendered his hand. "My name is Thomas Jung. Let me introduce our party. Francis Donlan, Nick Farnel, Sam Zakin—" Daniels tried to catch the names. He gave his own and shook six hard hands and one limp one. The atmosphere was less than calm.

Jung ran his tongue over white teeth and inside his cheeks, like a wolf considering a meal. "Come, Mr. Daniels, I guess you'd like to start in the cabin, where we can have a drink. Then, I'll show you around."

There was nothing to do but follow Jung and be gestured into the little hatchway, turn, and go down into the main saloon.

THIS drinks were good. Jung commanded and Francis mixed. Scotch and soda for himself and one other, and bourbon and sodas for the rest. There were seven men seated in the brown leather chairs around the polished table and pot-stove, but Daniels had seen at least three others, one in a white coat, exit into the other cabins aft. The *Mabel Skye* must have at least a dozen men aboard her.

There was a little small talk—what did Daniels think of four-masters?—had he ever sailed in one?—and then the roof fell in as Jung stood up.

"Ah, it's warm," he said as he shrugged out of his white linen coat, "very warm. Francis, help Mr. Daniels off with his coat."

The left lapel of the sport jacket was peeled back, quite as though in assistance, but enough to expose the Police Positive. A second later Daniels was looking into the barrels of three guns that he could see—and his own was taken away.

"Ah, me," Jung murmured reflectively, "would that I knew how you followed me."

He sipped his drink, patted prim lips with his handkerchief, and sighed. "The best laid plans, and all that. Come, tell me."

"All right," Daniels shrugged his shoulders, "Sammy and Nick got too friendly with Theresa."

Black thunder clouds of wrath gathered across the broad face of Jung. All the slaveness fled in a rising tide of red fury that surged in a blast of blood-backed anger

from the thick neck to the close-clipped blond hair.

One of the men in the cabin who did not have his gun out dug at his hip. Jung was as smooth as a magician. He hitched to his left and before he stopped moving a gun—a Colt .32 automatic instead of a Luger this time—spat fire past Daniels.

The man who had his hand in his hip pocket brought out a nickel-plated popper most of the way before Jung shot him through the breast.

Daniels sat perfectly still. The big man had evidently shot the man in back of Daniels' chair first, because he was faster than the punk with the nickel-plated. The two men groaned on the deck, their breaths bubbling and hacking like saw-blades on metal.

Mo grinned at Jung. "Take it easy now," he said softly, "I didn't go soft on Theresa."

The kill mist lifted from the heavy forehead. Jung laughed, not a nice laugh, Daniels figured, but better than a bullet. "That's right."

The Colt vanished. "Get this meat out of here," Jung snapped, "throw it in the lazarette and lock the hatch."

He stood up. "Pete. Watch the ladder overside. If Mr. Daniels comes within ten feet of it, kill him."

The man called Pete went up the hatch. "Come, Daniels," Jung continued, "let's get a bit of air after this smoke and blood."

He skipped up the hatch like a ballet dancer.

THIS man called Jung lay in his hammock. Daniels sat on a camp stool and looked morosely at the three men who watched him without seeming to. Jung had been listening to his own voice and enjoying it.

"Ah, yes, Daniels, a fine bit of detective work. Too bad the world will never know about it."

Jung's precise voice wore on, taunting Daniels with the bitter needle of defeat. The cat was playing, and when he tired, Daniels would join the others in the lazarette. They were probably quiet by now.

The wind was still blowing smartly, and Daniels looked up at the topmasts where they described gentle arcs against the sky with each roll of the ship.

Jung watched him. "Freedom," he in-

toned, "freedom to do what you like. How precious, and how silly. Freedom is meant for those who can take it."

There was a period of silence. The cat was getting tired.

The man called Peter walked towards them a few steps from the ladder. "Coast-guard boat," he called softly, "going to pass in close."

Jung swung easily to his feet. "Over to the other side of the ship, Mr. Daniels," he said, "and keep quiet. I have a man here who is very good with a knife. It can be quiet and below the rail if you insist."

Daniels retreated past the mast. "Don't worry about me," he said, "I want a few more hours."

Jung watched him with taunting eyes. "Oh, yes," he said, "I should tell you that Santos, there near you, carries the knife. He was once a sponge fisherman. If you care to dive overboard—I'm sure that Santos will soon visit you. The knife to the lungs would not be nice."

The last spark of hope threatened to die in Daniels' breast. Jung chuckled delightedly and turned away. He walked to the ladder and waved his hand at the Coastguardsmen that Daniels could not see.

It was a chance.

With a rushing leap Daniels sprang into the ratlines at his side. His desperate, almost nervous hands swung him around the black-tarred, ladderlike ropes that ran up to the mast and a second later he was moving skywards like a monkey.

The man called Santos sprang after him, then dropped to the deck as Jung gave a low command. Daniels stopped thirty feet above the deck and waved his arm desperately at the cox'n in the Coastguard boat. The sailor waved cheerfully back.

Daniels opened his mouth to shout, and his voice was lost in the cheers that came from below him! Jung and his men were waving and shouting gaily at the small vessel and others waved merrily at Daniels.

The cox'n waved again and then turned his back as he passed the *Mabel Skye* and headed for the Sound. The shouting died down, and Daniels was alone in the silence, swaying in his trap between sea and sky. He was left alone for a time.

One of the tiny figures below him walked up to a bulkier figure that was Jung and

handed him something. Daniels looked closer. It was the long-barreled Luger. Jung looked up at him, smiled, and sauntered back to stand beside the ladder, directly over Daniels' launch.

"We'll have a shooting party." The man spoke softly, and Daniels was amazed at how clearly the tones floated up to him.

"Jump for your boat, Mr. Daniels, if you like, or shall I drop you where you are?"

Mo looked at the shore a mile away. Nothing. He searched the Sound desperately for aid. Nothing. He looked down again. The roll of the schooner almost carried him over his launch, and then far away from it. Still, if he dropped into the sea, Jung would get him with the Luger the second he surfaced, or Santos would find him in the water. He shuddered a little as a cold blast of the wind blew under his shirt.

Daniels growled deep in his throat. He felt the hate for Jung flow through his veins like a burning drug. He wanted to kill the man with his hands and his teeth.

He looked down. The men were watching him and laughing.

DANIELS huddled himself on the ladder, and the laughs from below increased. He reached down with one hand and pulled both his shoelaces loose, wrenching the heels of the shoes over his ankles with painful roughness. He swung out over the launch and the laughing face of Jung. The Luger rose, and one or two pistols followed the bead. Then the mast rolled back and there was more laughter from below. When the mast had reached the peak of its swing, Daniels pushed with all his power. His leg muscles caught the thrust as he left the ratline in a driving back dive, the blue spun around him like a whirling pinwheel, then he knifed into the water and let the dive carry him into the depths.

He clawed his way down with sweeping breast strokes, wondering how long it would take the surprised Santos to cross the deck and dive after him. He could almost see the hunters scampering across the ship, panting with the thrill of the hunt. He hoped Santos was following him. The diver might be the only one who would think quickly what Daniels was trying to do.

His ears were popping, and regretfully

Daniels blew out a few bubbles of air. He turned in the water and swam forward and down with breast strokes and scissors kicks. His heart pounded. Now, with his life in his hands, he regretted the cigars and the liquor—it was an odd thought. He scrambled forward—felt himself rising—too much—too much.

Something stringy fouled his head and then he felt sharp pains in his back. He had come up beneath the ship. Desperately he put his hands and feet against the weeded, barnacled bottom and forced himself along.

Under her. Under her. My God—how big was she? He let go more air. He felt dizzy—slipping. The bottom of the ship sloped upward. He scrambled along. His hands were cut and scored, his elbows ripped to ribbons.

He was under the overhang and going upward. He could see the sky where it met the water. Why was there a red haze in front of it?

He surfaced and breathed.

One breath. Two breaths. Keep them soft. Keep them soft? How? When you're dying for air.

He swam softly towards the launch, his breathing making more noise than his progress. A few strokes and he lifted himself under quietly over the gun'l. The Mauser under the tarp came first, and then he retrieved the one in the forepeak.

He looked up and saw the back of Peter's head. He was watching the other side of the ship, where Daniels had disappeared.

Shouts and jeers came from where the diver must be working, looking for Daniels with a blade in his teeth.

Daniels stuck the Mauser from his left hand in his belt and hoisted his bedraggled form quietly up the ladder.

He shot Peter first. He wasn't going to; he wanted to make a turkey shoot of it, but Peter heard something and started to turn. The slug entered the left side of his back.

For a minute it was just like the rapid fire range. Daniels took them as they stood, across the hatch, unmindful that the first two had to take it in the back along with Peter.

Francis was next, and a man in a T-shirt with tattooed arms. They went to the deck

with their guns in their hands, half turned to face the music.

Jung managed to fire once, much too early. Daniels almost hated to do it so quickly. Through the chest, just as smoothly as if he were a Police Training Target.

Daniels got a 5-point on the man next to him, too, and then there was silence.

That should leave three. Down behind the hatch? Behind the booms? His bare feet carried him silently across the ship. A shoe scraped aft. Daniels fell on his belly and crawled alongside the hatch-cover, trying to look fore and aft at once. When he stuck his head around the hatch a gun blasted. The shot was high. Daniels scored another 5, right through the wishbone.

He gazed forward. The deck was empty, except for moaning, suffering, writhing men. He leaped out and pulled the long-snouted Luger from underneath Jung. The big man was frothing blood into a pool on the deck, and rolling his face back and forth in it as he shuddered and retched. He looked less than dapper now.

Daniels flipped the high, jack-knife action and watched a shell fly away and another one ride into the chamber. He had firepower.

Something thudded against the side of the ship. For a moment Daniels balanced, up on his toes, then his brain clicked and he ran back across the ship, pulling a Mauser from his belt. Ten yards from the pilot-ladder he looked over the side. Santos was clambering up the rungs, knife in his teeth.

"Throw that knife away and come aboard," Daniels barked. "Quick!"

SANTOS hesitated. Through his mind thoughts raced in such an obvious sequence that Mo could almost read them. Could this wild-eyed man looking over the side of the ship have defeated Jung and his gang? If Santos didn't fight for it, Jung would get him; all right, throw the knife away, like this—

The blade came sparkling through the sunlight at Daniels' throat. He pulled back so quickly that he lost sight of Santos, and in an instant the man was coming over the rail. Daniels shot him carelessly through the body. Santos kept right on coming.

The Mauser's double action clicked. Daniels jumped back and plowed the Luger in his left hand into Santos face. The Portagee staggered, gathered himself and moved forward.

It was pure *juramentado*. Daniels fired with the Luger's long barrel almost against the man's belt. Santos dropped like a stack of coins with the bottom knocked out.

There was silence on the *Mabel Skye* for several minutes.

"Hey!"

Daniels dropped into a firing crouch, Luger extended like a blunt rapier. "What?" He shouted at the unseen.

"Don't shoot. We give up."

"C'mon out."

The steward in the white coat and two others crept into view from the little engine room, on the starboard side opposite the galley.

"You in the white coat," Daniels rasped, "go aft to the chart room. Get some red flares and start firing 'em."

The man sidled past him and went toward the stern. Daniels shooed the other two men around in front of him so that he could keep most of the ship in view and settled down for a long pull. There might be others on the ship still gunning for him. After a while, a red rocket arched up from the after-hatch.

The purr of an inboard engine brought Daniels to the side of the schooner. It was the Coastguard picket boat rambling up to investigate the red flare.

"Hi," Daniels roared when the cox'n brought her within earshot, "come aboard. Trouble."

A few moments later two sailors in dungarees stepped to the deck of the *Mabel Skye* and stood frozen in astonishment.

Amid the moans of badly wounded or dying men, stood a huge, bedraggled husky with blood dripping from his hands and elbows which were scratched as though he had thrust them in a cement mixer. In the apparition's right hand was the biggest pistol they had ever seen, and at the other end of it stood three men who looked scared and beaten.

"Glad to have you aboard," the figure said.

Daniels grinned for a second at the looks on the young Coasties, then he gestured at the weapons on the deck.

"Pick yourself some hardware and help me search the ship for any more of these mugs."

"This is the end of the great train robbery."

TERENCE LIFFY gave a little dinner for Mo Daniels in the Manger's private dining room. The boys on the A. & N. force got a little high and cheered raucously when Liffy presented Mo with a check for five C's.

"This is for a man," Liffy made a little speech with the presentation, "who kept going down a blind alley."

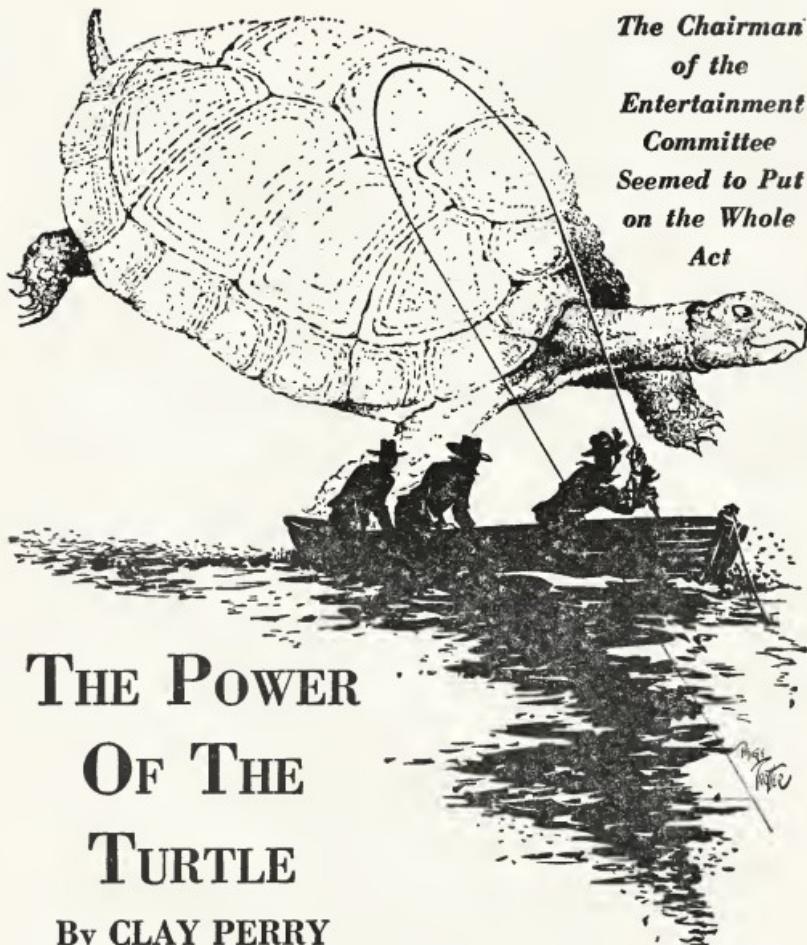
Daniels thanked them and sat back, dozing around his cigar while the boys dug into the after-dinner brandy. He was beginning to feel the three ponies he had put down.

He tried to remember the address of Theresa Talmadge. The gang had not implicated her, or perhaps those that might have were the ones who hadn't lived for the trial.

It didn't really matter. The V-8 was parked in back of the North Station. He could find the place with his eyes shut.



*The Chairman
of the
Entertainment
Committee
Seemed to Put
on the Whole
Act*



THE POWER OF THE TURTLE

By CLAY PERRY

NEVER underestimate the power of a snapping turtle. Bill Jimson did, and was lucky to live to regret it. This huge old mossback of the genus *chelone* was accidentally captured by Bill and two fishing friends in the waters of Lake Champlain one summer day while angling for great northern pike. They immediately dedicated the turtle to be the *piece de resistance* at the coming midsummer banquet of the Baytown Sportsmen's Club. Bill was chairman of the entertainment committee and he had been racking his brains to

try to rattle out something new and novel for a royal gorge at the club's cabin on its rearing pond shore. The club had eaten all kinds of fish and game, including imported bison and elk meat from the far west and woodchucks from local pastures, but not yet had the members enjoyed the succulent soup and flesh, the reputed seven kinds of meat which are to be found in the carcass of a snapping turtle. So they brought the big creature home.

Bill had a friend, Tony, who was a chef at a Baytown lunchcart, and who had a recipe for preparing green turtle soup and

a stew which would cause gastronomics to gargle with glee. Bill had tasted of such a combination and when he had this Leviathan safely locked in the steel trunk of Jim Hardwin's car which had brought them to Lake Champlain, he considered his problem solved. The turtle weighed something over forty pounds. It was as big around as a large dishpan. It had scales the size of a saucer, a head like a doubled fist, claws at the ends of its wrinkled legs with horny nails like steel, and a tough tail that was convenient as a handle to lift the creature, and carry it. Even Bill, who was a big, strong fellow, a boiler-maker by trade, found it desirable to wear gloves when he lifted the turtle, not to have the skin rasped off his palms by the sandpapery surface of the appendage.

Before imprisoning the aquatic giant in the stout steel trunk, the anglers removed everything from the folding box and deposited it inside the car, leaving only one seemingly indestructible object in the trunk. It was a length of lead pipe which Jim, who was a plumber, had brought along to whittle off hunks for sinkers. They drove one hundred miles to get home, and arrived near midnight at Bill's house. Using flashlights they removed the turtle from the steel trunk, not without some difficulty, for it persisted in curling its tail under its shell, tightly, and Bill had to use pliers to pull the tail out and get a handhold on it. When he lifted the beast he exclaimed,

"My gosh, he weighs more'n I thought he did at first!"

"Well, for gad's sake, look what he's got hold of in his jaws!" yelped Jack, the third member of the party.

Bill looked and his jaws fell open. The turtle had in its powerful grip a piece of twisted, scarred, bent and battered lead. It would hardly have been recognized by anyone who had not seen it before, as a piece of round lead pipe, for the turtle had gnawed, gnashed and crunched on it all the way from Lake Champlain. It now looked more like a large pale cruller that had been jumped on than anything else.

It took the three men half an hour to detach the length of lead from the gripping jaws of the turtle, and in the struggle, some of the greenish, mossy slime was scraped off the shell, the top shell or *carapace*, and

Bill saw something which he could scarcely believe. It was some carved figures and letters, faint but legible, "1824, J. S."

"My gosh, that means he's over a hundred years old!" croaked Bill. "J. S. stands for John Smith, I reckon."

"Jest as good a name as any," remarked Jim. "But, say, won't he be tough to eat, at that age?"

"Naw," declared Bill, with a knowing accent. "They never get tough. You got to know how to cook 'em, that's all. Tony can do the job. Roll that tub over here, Jim. Jack, get that broad piece of plank. Then you two lift that flagstone, if you can. We'll box him in for the night and I'll take him out to the cabin tomorrow and put a wire leash on him and tie him to a tree in the brook until next week. It'll sorta clean him out and season him, fresh."

John Smith was deposited upside down on the bottom of the tub, which was made from a solid oaken beer-barrel, sawed in two, its staves an inch thick. The broad plank, laid across the top, was held down by a thick flagstone which Jim and Jack barely were able to lift.

"There, that'll hold him," Bill cheered. "C'm on in an' have a little drink."

"Is your wife to home?" inquired Jim, who was also married.

"Yeah, but she's sound asleep an' we'll jest go into the woodshed. I got some stuff there. This calls for a little celebration. Say, did that tub move, jest now?"

"What kind of stuff you been drinkin'?" giggled Jim, licking his lips. "It's the way you wobbled the flashlight on the tub."

"I guess he couldn't move it," Bill agreed, but he walked all around the tub, inspecting it carefully. Peering through a crack where the plank did not quite meet the edge of the tub, he saw that the turtle still lay on its back, its yellowish *plastron* or lower shell gleaming, it's crooked, mailed legs gesturing in efforts to get John Smith right side up.

They went into the woodshed on tiptoe, in their socks, having removed their boots. Bill lifted a board in the floor and brought up three quart bottles, cool from being laid on the moist ground.

"It's dandelion wine, which I made it myself," he announced, in a proud whisper.

It fizzed and bubbled when the caps were removed and it sizzled as the thirsty trio

swallowed it, and like aspirin, it began to do its work in less than a minute.

BILL'S woodshed was a comfortable place, his retreat, not to say the doghouse. Bill had fixed it up with some seats, including a discarded old barber chair, which was his favorite, for in it he could relax, lying back, even sleep if he wanted to when not altogether welcome in the house. Jim and Jack each sat down on the two wide benches Bill had made against the shed walls, and in the midst of the celebration, one by one, the three fell sound asleep. The dandelion wine made a dandy sedative.

Bill awoke, with one eye, from some sound that was familiar and yet disturbing, in the dim, gray dawn. He was alone. He lay on his back, his head on the padded rest. He opened his other eye, and then closed both of them, quickly, for the world was whirling madly, round and round. Evidently his pals had been whirled off the edge, somehow, and Bill realized that he was left to face the music, alone, when Sheila, his wife, awakened.

"I gotta git up and take care of them dead soljers," he told himself, referring to the quart bottles.

He lifted his head an inch and then let it fall back, and groaned. His head was coming unscrewed. He made a violent effort to sit up, and he seemed to be falling an incredible distance. He just could not sit up. The chair pulled him back every time he tried, and it seemed to be turning on its axis, so that the walls of the woodshed were rotated rapidly before Bill's gummy, swollen eyes.

"Sons, a-guns went off'n lef' me," he complained hoarsely. "I thought I heard 'em start the car. Oh! Oh! Oh, I gotta git up, somehow!"

He managed it, finally, by rolling his big body over the chair arm, so that he fell out onto the floor. He had got up but he was down and there were some hard lumps under him, which, he discovered were quart bottles, quite empty. Six of them. He could not remember having got out three more of his precious bottles of dandelion wine and he was inclined to think that his pals had helped themselves after he went to sleep.

Minutes passed in slow motion, as Bill rolled about, on and off the round bottles,

and managed to get to his hands and knees. He crept over to the old sink where there was a faucet, which he caught as it dodged his unsteady hand, and turned on the good cold water. It was lucky that the drinking cup was of metal, for he dropped it three times before he got it filled and emptied its contents into the inferno of his mouth, throat and stomach. He then took a head shower, choked, coughed, got up, reeled back, stepped on a bottle and fell down, with a thud that shook things, including Bill.

A dim sound from inside the house caused Bill to crawl rapidly out the woodshed door into the yard. There was room there for him to reel about, better, and he staggered over to the parked car.

IT WAS Jim's car, still there, but not where it had been. It was just about ten feet from where it had been stopped, in the night, and inside were the two convicts, either dead or dead asleep, certainly dead drunk. Jim was bedded down on the steering wheel in front and Jack was jack-knifed on his back in the rear seat, his feet well tangled in fishline from a broken rod with which he evidently had battled.

Bill was deeply thankful that Jim had not been able to drive out of the yard, but what galvanized Bill suddenly, and somewhat sobered him, on top of the sound of Sheila stirring about in the house, was the sight of the oaken tub, which lay on its side, empty and unloaded.

"Holy Old Mackinaw — John Smith!" ejaculated Bill. "They went an' knocked the tub over, the drunken bums! Why, I'll kill the blasted—"

"Bill, oh, Bill, is that you?"

The dulcet tones of Sheila's voice came from up in the air. Bill made out that she was looking out an upstairs window, clad in a dressing gown, her hair down, her face undecorated save by what seemed to be a grim look.

"Why, sure, it's me, darlin'. Is that you?" he managed to answer.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"We jus' got home," Bill lied. "The boys were all tired out so they went to sleep in the car, but dammit, Sheila, they upset the tub an' John Smith's got away."

"John Smith? What was he doing in a

tub? Bill, are you all right. What have you been drinking?"

"Not a thing but water," Bill declared. "See how wet my hair is. You don't need to worry. It's early yet. I got to find John Smith and he can't be far away. McBbe they put him back into the trunk. Now you jus' take it easy, Sheila."

The horn on Jim's car started to blow, and it kept on blowing. Sheila vanished from the window in a flash. Bill rushed to the car, pulled open the left hand door. Jim fell out against him and the horn stopped, relieved of his dead weight. Bill eased Jim to the ground and shook him.

"Wake up, Jim," he appealed. "You gotta wake up. John Smith's gone. You fellers musta—didja put him into the trunk again?"

"What trunk? Oh, and what kinda stuff is that we drunk? I'm sick. I'm burnin' up inside. Lemme alone. How'd I git here. I went home las' night. I was all right. I drove all right."

"Ten feet," spat Bill, adding, to himself, "I'm damn glad he didn't get outta the yard. They gotta wake up and help me find John Smith an'—an' tell Sheila we jus' got home. Jack, Jack! Wake up an' unsnarl yourself from that fishline an'—good gosh, what a smell in this car! Oh, it's them pike!"

He had forgotten all about the northern pike which they had crammed into their creels, which had been in the trunk until removed and placed inside to make room for John Smith. The interior of the car, with all windows closed and two men sleeping and emitting fumes on a warm July night, had become impregnated with an odor that would shame a glue factory and a brewery. Bill became a bit sick, but controlled himself, expecting Sheila to appear in the back yard, any minute.

He went and looked at the tipped tub. There was nothing in it. He sought for tracks of the escaped turtle. He found them, leading off, out of the yard, onto a cement sidewalk—and there he lost them. The royal gorge dream was gone, but Bill's gorge rose and Jim, suddenly coming to his senses, clambered into his car and drove away without saying goodbye. He had seen Sheila coming out the woodshed door.

Bill now told Sheila the truth, or a reasonable facsimile of it, and she wouldn't believe him.

"Just you show me that turtle," was her demand, "I've already seen the six empty bottles of dandelion wine."

THE news of the vanishing John Smith got into the *Baytown Bugle* and shortly a swarm of small boys appeared in the vicinity of Bill's home, seeking big game, and as Bill's home was on the edge of a public park which had a small pond in it, they gravitated to the pond. Bill had not thought about the pond, for there were no fish in it and to Bill, water was something to have fish in.

One evening as he sat on the doorstep of the dog-house-woodshed moodily unsnarl-ing a blacklash from one of his reels, he heard sharp shots, over in the park. They persisted and Bill got up and walked over a little hill and saw some boys, one with a rifle, and the splash of bullets in the water. He hastened to the edge, shouting at the boy with the gun to lay off or he'd call a cop.

"What you shootin' at, anyway?" he demanded, suspecting what.

"A sea serpent," answered the juvenile rifleman. "I hit him, too."

Bill looked hard and made out the bulging back of a snapping turtle, out in the middle of the shallow pond. He had his hip boots on and he waded out and got hold of that scaly tail and lugged John Smith home in triumph, followed by a platoon of small boys.

The turtle had a hole in its shell but seemed nowise affected by the wound.

"What you goin' do with him mister?" inquired the boys.

"We're goin' to eat him."

This time Bill put John Smith under the upturned tub and placed three flagstones on it. The boys stood around and kicked at the tub until Bill warned them to leave it alone. He called Sheila. He removed the stones and lifted the tub a bit and showed Sheila the turtle. She screamed and ran back into the house, crying out, "You get that thing away from here!"

Bill immured John Smith again and went and phoned to Jim.

"Come over with your car and help me take that turtle out to the club cabin," he demanded.

Jim came at once. He helped Bill bore

a hole with bit and brace in the rear of the turtle's aged shell, and Bill cut a stout piece of telephone wire and thrust one end through the hole and twisted it tight. At the club grounds they placed John Smith down in the brook that ran from the rear-ing pond, and wound the wire twice about the base of an elm tree and twisted it together.

"If that don't hold him, I'm a sucker," said Bill. "We'll have the banquet next Thursday."

"Mebbe we'd better kill him now and put him in cold storage at Tony's place," suggested Jim.

"Naw, I want the boys to see him alive. They been callin' me a liar."

AGAIN the *Baytown Bugle* blew, in big black headlines, about the recapture of John Smith, slightly wounded but doing as well as could be expected. The Baytown Sportsmen's Club held an informal meeting at the cabin to which nobody needed to be invited; they came. They came to see the *piece de resistance* for the royal banquet which had been postponed a week. Bill was late in arriving, because he had been explaining things all over again to Sheila. When he did show up he was greeted with roars of derision, and a shouted song:

"There was an old man named Bill,
Who lived near the side of a hill.
He ain't been sober, since last October
And we don't think he ever will.

"There was a big turtle called John,
Born in eighteen hundred and one;
He was going to be et,
But he ain't cooked yet
And we don't think he'll ever get done."

This went on for a long time while Bill and some of his remaining friends, trudged moodily down the brook, looking for John Smith. The telephone wire was still there, attached to the tree, with the loop which had been twisted into the turtle's shell, still a loop, but holding nothing.

Three days later, Bill, having stubbornly refused to give up, was patrolling the acreage of the club grounds when he found John Smith. He was slumbering in a culvert that ran beneath the road. Bill poked him out

with a long pole and lugged him back to the cabin area. He got the telephone wire, straightened it out, then, with his foot on John Smith's back, he twisted the wire around beneath the edge of the *carapace*, and with pliers, drew it tight and wired his captive to a big log near the fireplace.

"I guess that harness would hold a elephant," Bill told John Smith, and himself, and he went home, happy.

Bill had made up with Sheila and he hadn't touched a drop of dandelion wine since that awful night. There wasn't any left.

He went to see Tony about cooking John Smith. Tony described the process in detail.

"You taka da tortle an' you taka beeg dishpan full of water w'ich you maka boil on da stove. You drop da tortle into da boilin' water like a lobster, only first you cut off his head with' a haxe. You boil heem five-ten minoot, den taka da tortle out an' you cut off de bottom shell. Den you get heem an' you take out all de meat, which is seven kinds of, an' you clean de meat good an' den you taka de shells an' put dem into a kettle an' boil dem a leetle. Den you taka dem out an' skin off de scales. Den you put dem shells back in de kettle an' boil heem so to make de nice green tortle soup. Den you take de meat w'ich you put in another kettle an' you t'row in potato, carrot, onion, turnip, all kinda vegetable, an' you make a stew. It's sure good to eat. I et it many time. Yum! I feex heem. You breeng tortle here."

"Oh, I thought you'd cook him out at the club fireplace, Tony."

"Naw, naw. You breeng heem here w're I can work on heem better. I keel heem myself. I no 'fraid."

"Well, neither am I," declared Bill. "I'd just love to kill the bloody beast."

BUT he got goose pimples all over him when he arrived at the place where John Smith had been wired to a log. John Smith was gone, again. There was a length of wire left, just the length that had reached from the log to the butt of John Smith's tail. Quite evidently the turtle was off, in harness, but without a halter or bridle reins.

It took three days to convince an apoplectic Bill Jimson that no one in the club or out of it had done a dirty trick with pliers. He tried to resign as chairman of the enter-

tainment committee—but the boys wouldn't let him.

"You've got to produce a turtle soul and stew banquet, Bill, if you have to go get another turtle," declared the president of the club, who happened to be Bill's employer. "You've got to prove you're a good sport."

Bill had no idea where he could capture another turtle, and he was sure he never would find one as big as John Smith. But luck seemed to be with him, for the very next afternoon, as Bill was driving into the club grounds to do a little fly-casting with barbless hooks at the rearing pool, and try to calm himself, he saw John Smith. John was in the ditch beside the road, heading in the general direction of Lake Champlain.

With a howl of delight Bill halted his jalopy, which was a vintage tudor with bucket seats in front, and jumped out and grabbed John by the tail, heaved him into the rugless tonneau, on his back and headed for Tony's place at top speed. If he'd had an axe with him he'd have chopped off John's head, but he didn't.

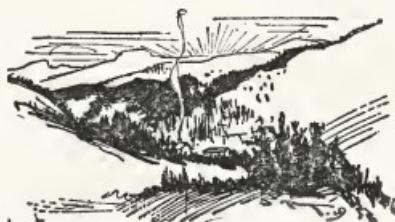
Just as he was about to make a left hand turn into Main Street near the Country Club, something clamped onto Bill's right ankle from behind, like a vise. Despite the fact that he had his rubber boots on and heavy wool socks inside, the thing that put the bite on Bill seemed about to sever his Achilles tendon. The pain caused Bill to shove down on the accelerator, hard, and the jalopy, instead of taking a turn, shot across the highway and folded itself up against a telephone pole, then tipped over. It just missed clipping a passing car in which was a woman who could scream louder than Sheila—but no louder than Bill could cuss. And she didn't know many of the words that

Bill used, as he somehow extricated himself from the wreck, with one boot torn at the ankle. He was hurt in several places but the pain in his heel kept him from realizing his other injuries, and when he tried to walk his leg gave way and he fell to the ground and lay there, holding onto his foot,

The cops came in an astonishingly short time, even before Bill could pull himself together and get up to look at his car, and John Smith. To make matters worse, the cops wouldn't believe that Bill had been bitten on the ankle by a snapping turtle—because there was no snapping turtle in the car when they investigated.

There was a pond on the Country Club grounds, a deep one, within a few yards off the highway, but nobody save Bill would believe that a turtle could make that distance in so short a time. Bill couldn't prove it, for he never did find John Smith again. He was able to prove by witnesses, including his wife, Jim and Jack, that such a turtle did exist, when he came into court on charges of reckless driving, impeded operation, defective brakes, traveling on the wrong side of the public way and damaging public property. But John Smith, it seems, was a part of the impeded operation charge, so that didn't help much.

Bill proved himself a good sport, though. He paid his fines without protest and put an ad in the *Bugle* offering a handsome reward for snapping turtles which would aggregate at least forty pounds, one or more. He got three of them from small boys within two days and at the banquet the boys sang a song about an old man named Bill and he was re-elected chairman of the entertainment committee and his boss gave him a handsome hike in pay, and Bill never after that underestimated the power of a snapping turtle.



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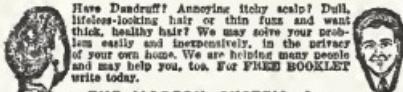
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(Continued from page 75).

to do with that "Toad" of his to be found elsewhere in this SHORT STORIES.

"This 'Jumping Toad' affair, when I came to write it, promised to be another 'trading-post' Northern; but just about that time our eldest boy flew down from Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, kept us up nightly till the wee sma' hours talking hardrock, drill-shafts, drifting and levels, till the color of his yarns flowed into this one that I was ready to start. The boy had been raised at Northern trading-posts, and after a nine-year trick with the RCMP, he thought he'd like to head north again and see what this mineral activity was all about. Now, me, between spells at trading and trapping, I'd found time to put in a season with a diamond-drilling crew up on Reindeer Lake and I thought I had some idea of what a present-day mining-camp was like. I figured it'd be pretty much what it always was—a collection of shack-tents far out in the wilderness populated mostly by sourdoughs with tobacco-stained beards; but what I heard changed my conception entirely.

"Yes, these camps were out in the bush all right, but they were constructed of lumber instead of logs; the crews slept in steel cots instead of pole bunks, and they preferred freshly laundered sheets and pillow slips to blankets and rabbit-robés. He spoke of other things the companies had done to make life at these camps attractive—of the bowling alleys and the skating rinks, the tennis courts and the picture shows. And instead of men herding together in long, evil-smelling bunkhouses, they paired off in hotel-like rooms. He said that the drill crews, the hardrock men who worked in continual dampness and the roar of com-

pressed-air underground, were mostly young fellows like himself. They worked their five, six or eight hours, came up and showered. When they stepped out again in civilized dress, you couldn't tell whether they were from the shaft or the office.

"Yellowknife itself is served mainly by air from Edmonton, and he spoke of the long runway and landing field built there to accommodate anything from a tiny Moth to the biggest four-engined Doug. He told us of the bush pilots, flying every day at treetop level to keep the outlying camps going in supplies. Of the boys at these camps chartering planes for a weekend in town. And of the camps, employing over a thousand men, shutting down operations over the pay-periods because there weren't enough of these boys left in camp to keep them going. Yellowknife—the new Eldorado. And when he spoke of it, there was an excitement in his eyes like there is in the eyes of every other man who comes down from there.

"The new Eldorado—the hug of a territory represented by hard work, high wages and easy spending; by terrific gambles taken by the big mining-companies; a country that demands the best in a man and that takes the best out of him. For few of these hard-rock boys stay in the game after thirty-five. And after hearing all about it, trading and trapping seemed sort of tame in comparison. But while this younger crop travel their miles by air to labor unmercifully with their arms and backs, we old-timers who used to travel the same sort of country at the tail-end of a string of dogs were probably a whole lot stronger in the legs."

H. S. M. Kemp



Hurricane Aftermath

LAST year Neil Martin wrote us some very thrilling letters about the great hurricane which wrought such devastation in the South. He now says that in his part of Mississippi things are fairly normal again, but gives one interesting sidelight on the after effects of the terrific blow. SHORT

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STORIES readers being interested in all sorts of outdoor affairs, we pass on Mr. Martin's latest letter. His latest story is "Killers on the Make" in this issue.

"It looks as if the trapping fraternity are due to take a beating this season," writes Mr. Martin. "In the hurricane of last September 19, thousands of muskrats were drowned, and their carcasses smelled up the scenery for days after the high water had receded. Consequently, the trappers may expect a poor season.

"Because Brer Muskrat is known to be amphibious, many people will, no doubt, ask how come they were drowned. The fact is that, although the muskrat is an expert swimmer, he can't swim for long distances. Besides, Mother Nature never intended him to buck such a tidal wave as that which swept over much of the Louisiana marshes last September.

"Mr. Percy Viosca, New Orleans biologist, recently reported a complete absence of muskrats and marks of their habitation in the marsh area between Petit Pas and Nine-mile Bayou, in St. Bernard Parish. He was accompanied on his survey by Louis Jeanfreau, trapper superintendent of Chef Menteur.

"Their inspection revealed that in the area surveyed all rat hills had been washed away, and that not a single hill in the area had been rebuilt. And this in a section which averaged 23,000 muskrat pelts annually, in addition to about 300 mink pelts.

"The survey also revealed a complete absence of native birds and insects in the area, with the exception of dogflies, greenheads and gnats. Not even the footprint of a muskrat or a mink could be found. In this area, which before the hurricane had averaged ten muskrat hills to the acre, everything had been wiped out. So it looks as if the marsh dweller will shrug aside one more misfortune with the customary phrase: 'I suis fait. Oui!' (I am used to it. Yes!)"

Neil Martin

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